

HOSHI SHINICHI AND THE SPACE-AGE FABLE

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In Japan, the works of Hoshi Shinichi can be said to be synonymous with science fiction and the short short story. It is true that Hoshi is a pioneering figure as far as these categories are concerned. However, such an association place them in categories that have a tendency to hinder them from being valued as works possessing the kind of literary merit they deserve. Hence, in the following, first, the terms science fiction and the short short story will be looked at in relation to Hoshi's works. Next, space age fable and folk tale are considered as terms that more accurately describe the features of his works that are noteworthy. Finally, two of Hoshi's short short stories will be introduced in order to demonstrate that a feature in his works that distinguish them from being merely light entertainment is the incorporation of satire.

Hoshi Shinichi and Science Fiction

Hoshi Shinichi was born in 1926, in Tokyo. He graduated from the University of Tokyo in agricultural chemistry, and proceeded to graduate school, which he soon quit in order to join his father's company, Hoshi Pharmaceuticals. When his father died in 1945, he became the head of the company, but due to business failure, he was forced to retire in 1957. He then focussed his energy

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into writing, and assisted Shibano Takumi² in founding a magazine called *Uchūjin* (Cosmic Dust), the first Fanzine³ in Japan. Hoshi's first short story, entitled 'Sekisutora' (Sextra), about world peace being attained as a result of an invention which took care of sexual desire, was published in *Uchūjin* also in the same year. He has produced well over a thousand works since then, and although he did not limit himself to writing science fiction only, this became the genre for which he is best remembered. He is often referred to as the first full-time professional writer of science fiction in Japan, and in 1976, he became the first president of the Japan SF Writer's Club. In this respect, he was a pioneering figure who made science fiction palatable and appealing to a wide readership in Japan.

What exactly, then, constituted Hoshi Shinichi's science fiction, and how did this aid in the promotion of the new genre to the novice readers? As the editor of the new and only anthology of Japanese science fiction published in English, John Apostolou, comments 'Japanese critics looked upon science fiction as a sub-literary form, and *for some odd reason, placed it within the mystery genre.*'⁴ However, it is not really odd when one considers how the genre came about in Japan. When Hoshi became the first president of the Japan SF Writers Club, he 'displayed a uniqueness in the field of the detective story on the one hand,'⁵ while also incorporating his ideas in futuristic settings in collections of short short stories such as *Uchū no aisatsu* (Greetings from Outer-space) and *Bokko-chan*. Spy novels, detective fiction, and mystery stories were popular predecessors of science fiction in Japan, and Hoshi was one of the many fans of these forefathers who progressed to the newly born genre of science fiction. Hoshi first began writing science fiction in *Hōseki*, which was a magazine for detective fiction. In an interview, Hoshi admits that because science fiction was only a minor part of this magazine, he felt reluctant to write a long piece of work.⁶ Furthermore, he admits that he did not start writing science fiction especially, and in fact, did not even know that such a genre or category existed. Hard-core science fiction was not acceptable in *Hōseki*, and the readers had to be presented with stories that they could easily comprehend. Therefore, Hoshi decided to keep the expressions simple, and included a surprise ending which could clearly be appreciated by people unfamiliar with science fiction.

When a list of titles from Hoshi's books are glanced, such as *Uchū no aisatsu* (Greetings from Outer-space), *Yōkoso Chikyū-san* (Welcome, Mr.

² Shibano Takumi (1926-) is a Japanese writer, critic, and translator. He is a leading figure in the Japanese science fiction community and an award named after him was set up in 1982 for high achievers in the science fiction field in Japan.

³ A fanzine is an amateur magazine produced by science fans. The term was coined by Russ Chauvenet in 1941 and is now used by non-science fiction fans also.

⁴ John L. Apostolou, 'Introduction' in John L. Apostolou and Martin H. Greenberg (Ed.), *The Best Japanese SF Stories* (New York: Barricade Books Inc., 1977), p. 14. My italics.

⁵ Ishikawa Takashi, *SF no jidai - Nihon SF no taidō to tenbō* (Tokyo: Kisōtengaisha, 1977), p. 191.

⁶ 'Interview' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Gotagota kiryu* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1982), pp.220-221.

Earth!), and *Hitonigiri no mirai* (A handful of the future) they immediately instigate the image of science fiction. The future settings and the appearance of robots, spaceships, scientists and aliens also conjure up a science fiction world in the minds of the readers. However, are these the only things that place Hoshi's works in the science fiction category and if so, what other features are there that represent a more solid foundation?

The definition of science fiction in the West is open to much debate. According to Basil Davenport, no two people would agree to the same definition.⁷ For example, Mark Rose describes it as 'the characteristic romance form of the scientific age'⁸ and furthermore, writes that like the traditional romance, its generalising mode uses representative rather than individualised characters, thus making them not psychological. On the other hand, Robert Conquest states that 'it may be psychological – like a story of the future, 'Beyond Bedlam', which appeared in *Galaxy*, about a time when the psychological tensions destructive of society have been resolved by the withdrawal of clashing personality facets in every individual into two distinct personalities, each of which has the use of the body for a week at a time...'⁹ There are numerous other definitions proposed, and this is understandable when one notes that science fiction covers an extensive field with writers that may differ like chalk and cheese. The origin of the word goes back to 1929, when Hugo Gernsback published *Science Wonder Stories*. After World War One, a great supply of fantastic stories emerged in America, and from the early 1920's, the word, *pseudoscientific story* was used, but Gernsback disliked the term and coined a new word, *scientifiction*, which eventually changed to *science fiction*.¹⁰ During the early period when science fiction first gained its popularity, a lot of the writing had low literary merit with authors abusing the reader's awe for the new scientific age, but later when the craze died down, works of a higher standard, in terms of content and style, emerged.

With such a background in America, science fiction was introduced into Japan and as mentioned earlier, Hoshi became the pioneer of science fiction writing in Japan. Hoshi's own definition of science fiction is as follows.

SF has various elements and each person has a different claim, but I find appealing the kind of works that allow us to look at situations from a completely different angle. [...] Also, there is a theory that SF should initiate the criticism of civilization. In my opinion, this is the ideal, and I intend to keep making an effort to do this.¹¹

Science fiction is a term the meaning of which cannot be pinpointed simply

⁷ Basil Davenport, *The Science Fiction Novel* (Chicago: Advent Publishers, 1969), pp.8-9.

⁸ Mark Rose, 'Introduction' in *Science Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1976), pp.1-3.

⁹ Robert Conquest, 'Science fiction and literature' in *Science Fiction*, *ibid.*, p.34.

¹⁰ Ishikawa Takashi, *ibid.*, p.144.

¹¹ Otsubo Naoyuki, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Kimagure boshi no memo* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, c1972, 1988), p.381.

because of the many expectations held by different readers. However, it is a genre that has crowned Hoshi with an unshakable identity as far as its history is concerned in Japan. While it is easy to identify the outer layer of the neat package that envelopes Hoshi's science fiction, consisting of themes and settings, there are other features that represent his works that are vital for a fuller understanding and appreciation of them. As mentioned above, Hoshi embraced the opportunity that science fiction allowed him to look at society and its people from fresh angles and in doing so offer sharp criticism. Therefore, for this deeper level behind the robots and spaceships, his works deserve a high literary merit.

Hoshi and the Short Short Story

Apart from science fiction, Hoshi is also well acknowledged as a writer of the short short story and an examination of Hoshi and the short short story is vital for understanding the nature of his works. Ozaki Hotsuki writes that, 'Hoshi Shinichi incorporated fantasy and nonsense, and moreover the essence of science fiction and mystery, and created the short short story form suitable for the unveiling of the space age.'¹² This is an apt description and it is right that Hoshi should be given credit for the creation of the short short story form in Japan.

In the West the form is generally expected to have the following features: 1) a fresh idea; 2) a perfect plot; 3) an unexpected ending.¹³ These features are amply displayed in Hoshi's works and this may be the reason for their popularity. A fresh idea or a series of fresh ideas are incorporated in the form of new inventions, or novel settings/situations, especially in his science fiction stories. Hoshi was a writer who noted ideas down whenever they came to him, then rearranged them like a magic formula when writing his next story. Hoshi's works also featured the perfect plot, which is vital in stories of short length. His sentences are all precise and to the point so that there is no wastage of space. Every single thing that is mentioned in the story plays a necessary role in supporting the well-structured, well-organised plot. This perfect plot in Hoshi's works propels the reader onwards to the very end where there is an amusing and unexpected twist.

Some good examples of Hoshi's stories that feature the above elements include 'Atsusa' (Heat), 'Tōsō no michi' (Escape Route), and 'Yukitodoita seikatsu' (Comfortable Life). In 'Atsusa', a man arrives at a police station and asks to be arrested. It is a very hot day and he explains that ever since he was a young boy he could not stand the heat but he had discovered a sure way of feeling relief. Every summer he had been killing something different. He started off with a tiny insect but each year, the creature had to gradually move

¹² Ozaki Hotsuki, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Chiguhagu na buhin* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1998), p.276.

¹³ Otsubo, *ibid.*, p.380.

up on the evolutionary scale until last year, he confesses to having killed his pet monkey, which he purchased the previous autumn in anticipation of needing to kill something again. The policeman refuses to arrest the man because he has not killed a person yet. However, as the man is reluctantly leaving the station, he mentions in passing that last autumn, he was married. The writer is left to use his/her imagination as to what was pending.

In 'Tōsō no michi', two criminals jump on a train in order to escape from the police. However, they soon notice that there is something odd about the train and its passengers. Nobody is moving, talking, or showing the slightest signs of life. They are all sitting still in the same position, as though they were asleep. Meanwhile, the train never stops anywhere but travels faster and faster. At the end of the story, the reader is made aware of the fact that the train was being used as an experiment and the passengers were crash test dummies. The train, which the criminals had thought to be their escape route, had in fact, turned out to be a route of death.

Finally, in 'Yukitodoita seikatsu', a typical morning for a man living in the future is described. Technology has become so advanced that the man does not need to lift a finger from the moment he wakes up to the moment he arrives at work. The robotic *hand* wakes him up, shaves him, showers him, gets his breakfast, and even turns on the TV while he is eating. He is placed in the travelling pod and automatically conveyed to his office. It is only when he finally arrives at work that someone notices that he has been dead since the previous night. The situation is novel and interesting, and the surprise ending conveys irony in the fact that people have become so reliant on technology that they can get dressed and arrive at work as a corpse!

Having demonstrated above that Hoshi's works fit the ideal short short story criterion, it must also be mentioned that it is still uncertain whether the short short story was adopted from the West or it stemmed from a form of Japanese origin. According to Ikushima Jirō,¹⁴ it was probably first acknowledged as a genre in Japan when Tsuzuki Michio¹⁵ introduced the works of foreign writers such as Stanley Ellen, Robert Bloch, Henry Slessor, Frederic Brown, and Roald Dahl. However, it seems that even before the term became established in Japan, Hoshi Shinichi was already writing them. In fact, Ikushima comments that Hoshi's version developed characteristics of its own, quite distinct from the Western variety.

In pre-war Japan, there existed a tradition called *konto*, which is a name derived from the French word, *conte*. Okada Saburō (1890-1954), who was a writer of the Showa Period, returned from France in 1923, and introduced *conte* (*konto*) to Japan and set it in vogue during the latter part of the Taishō Period. According to the Kōjien dictionary, *konto* is (1) a witty short story; a shorter than short story; a palm-of-the-hand story; nuveau roman romance; or (2) a satire; a dramatic sketch abundant in jest. Hence, this could be where the short short story originated. Kawabata Yasunari may be the best known

¹⁴ Ikushima Jirō, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Shiroi fuku no otoko* (Tokoyo: Shinchōsha, 1977), p.183.

¹⁵ Tsuzuki Michio was born in 1929 in Tokyo, and became a prolific writer of mystery.

writer of palm-of-the-hand stories which were written mainly in the 1920's and collected together in the anthology, *Tenohira no shōsetsu*. Yoshimura Sadashi stresses, however, in the introduction to this anthology that 'the palm-of-the-hand story is not the same as the *konto*.'¹⁶ Thus it is unclear whether the Japanised word, *konto*, can be used interchangeably with either the palm-of-the-hand story or the short short story, even though the dictionary bunches them all together as one. The reason given by Yoshimura, for wanting to avoid the term *konto* when referring to Kawabata's works, is the tendency the term has for conjuring up images of simple anecdotes or small talk which are inferior to a work of literature. He also adds that a *konto* can be over a hundred pages and hence does not follow the short length format.

When describing Kawabata's palm-of-the-hand story, *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia*¹⁷ (Eibun Nihon daijiten) supplies the words, *vignette* or *short short story* to describe them in Western terms. Although Western terms can be applied to Kawabata's short works, they still appear to have their own characteristics, just as Hoshi's short short stories differ from the Western counterparts. Kawabata himself 'thought of the form as peculiarly Japanese, in the tradition of *haiku*'.¹⁸

Hence it may be best to surmise that although the French *conte* may have started the cogwheels in motion during the 1920's for Japanese writers to produce extremely short pieces of literature, master writers like Kawabata changed the original forms into their unique variants. Ozaki Hotsuki, who asserts that Hoshi started the short short story form in Japan, also mentions that the form is derived from the *konto*.¹⁹ Thus, it may be that the direct descendant of Hoshi's form was the *konto*, rather than the short short story form that Tsuzuki Michio introduced later. When asked how to write a good short short story, Hoshi himself mentions the French word, *conte*, replying that one must practice telling one's favourite story, whether it be a French *conte* or a *kobanashi* from the Edo Period or even a *conte* from one's favourite magazine.²⁰ Therefore, it appears as though Hoshi certainly used the *conte* form as a basis for his writing.

Space-age fables or folk tales?

Apart from the features of the short short story, Hoshi's works contain characteristics that can be compared to a fable. In style, the fable is short, simple, with a moral at the end. It often features animals, but people and Gods

¹⁶ Yoshimura Sadashi, 'Kaisetsu' in Kawabata Yasunari's *Tenohira no shōsetsu* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1989), p.553.

¹⁷ *Japan: An Illustrated Encyclopaedia* (Eibun Nihon daijiten) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993), p.760.

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Ozaki Hotsuki, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Chiguhagu na buhin*, p.276.

²⁰ Wada Makoto, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Samazama na meiro* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1972), pp.276-277.

also appear. When people are used, they are referred to as ‘the man’ or ‘the farmer’. Here is an Aesop fable that features two people.

A Friend In Need Is A Friend Indeed

Two friends were travelling together when a bear suddenly appeared. One of them climbed up a tree in time and remained there hidden. The other, seeing that he would be caught in another moment, lay down on the ground and pretended to be dead. When the bear put its muzzle to him and smelt him all over, he held his breath – for it is said that a bear will not touch a corpse. After it had gone away, the other man came down from his tree and asked his friend what the bear had whispered in his ear. ‘It told me,’ he replied, ‘not to travel in future with friends who do not stand by one in peril.’

Moral: Genuine friends are proved by adversity.²¹

In this fable, there are two men who are described as friends, but in the face of adversity, their real friendship is challenged. Without names, the two men could be anybody, just like the people who appear in Hoshi’s stories. His stories feature ‘the man’ or ‘the thief’ and more noticeably people referred to by initials of the English alphabet, such as *N*, *S*, or *F* commonly written in Japanese using katakana like エヌ. An anonymous reviewer of the *Sankei* newspaper speculates on the identity of エヌ氏 (Mr.N) as follows.

Enu-shi (Mr. N) embodies the author’s ennui, his pessimism, the comical stupidity and his cold eyes that gaze at it. Mr. N is Normal, Nomad, Nobody, and moreover somebody close to us. (Hikari, *Sankei* Newspaper).²²

In this way, it is possible to bestow multiple identities to the mysterious Mr. N. The author himself explains his use Mr. N as follows.

The reason for not using the Roman letter ‘N’, is because when it mixes with Japanese script, it is too noticeable and does not blend in. The reason for not using other letters of the alphabet is because the pronunciation of ‘N’ is the most unpretentious. Further, the reason for not using a proper name is because the name of a Japanese person can indicate their character or age. Names that signify dignity or beauty certainly appear to exist.²³

The above statements are not altogether accurate, as Hoshi does not restrict himself to エヌ (*enu*) and moreover, the Roman letters of the initials are found in some stories. Although エヌ氏、エフ氏 and エス氏 are frequently used,

²¹ *Fables of Aesop* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 1964), p.180.

²² *SF no jidai*, p.43.

²³ Ishikawa Takashi, p.37.

an アール氏 (Mr. R) appears in 'Kikai' (Opportunity) for example, and in 'Yoru no meshitsukai' (Night Servant), the main character is Mr. Nio, which is not even an initial. The Mr. M in 'Zeikin-girai' (Tax hater) has the Romanised M, and the Roman letter is also used for the Mr. N in 'Kyōki to dangan' (Madness and the bullet).²⁴ However, in any case, it is true that, Hoshi's works tend to be devoid of personal pronouns and the stories are kept general with people who only represent a certain type of person. 'Megusuri' (The Eye Lotion) and 'Nusumareta shorui' (The Stolen Document) are two examples of Hoshi's works that can be considered as science fiction, but contain a moral like a fable.

In 'Megusuri', Mr. K invents an eye lotion which allows the user to distinguish good people from evil. Anyone with evil intentions would look purple. He tries the lotion out and manages to successfully catch a thief. Thinking of the lucrative future he could have by using this useful new invention, he happens to glance at himself in the mirror and is shocked to see that his own face had turned purple. This makes him quickly throw the eye lotion away.

In 'Nusumareta shorui', Dr. F, who is well known for inventing superb drugs, gets his latest invention stolen by a thief. However, soon after taking the drug, the thief returns to Dr. F's laboratory and apologises for his act. The final surprise of the story reveals that the drug had the effect of awakening the user's conscience and therefore made the thief confess to his crime. Dr. F is happy that the drug has been tested successfully.

In both stories, there is an ironic twist at the end, which functions like the moral of a fable. In 'Megusuri', Mr. K unwittingly falls victim to evil ideas brought on by the success of his product. In 'Nusumareta shorui', the thief unknowingly becomes the helper of Dr. F's experiment. In both cases, evil is satirised by irony that occurs to vulnerable victims of temptation. Hirai Kazumasa sees Hoshi as a true moralist, who writes modern fables (*gendai no gūwa*) full of warnings.²⁵ Others like Wada Makoto, the illustrator of many of Hoshi's books, uses the word folk tale to describe Hoshi's works. He writes that they have robots and aliens but they also have devils, fairies, and the grim reaper, like works of fantasy.²⁶ Thus, Hoshi's works can also be linked with folk tales for comparison.

I wrote earlier that Hoshi was a science fiction writer, and it is clear that that is not incorrect, but he does not only write science fiction. I came to this conclusion after reading many of his works. There are spaceships in his stories. There are aliens. There are robots too. In that respect, his works are SF, but Hoshi's works can be wider in

²⁴ All of the stories mentioned here in connection to names are from Hoshi Shinichi's *Osekkana kamigami* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1979).

²⁵ Hirai Kazumasa, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Okashi na senzo* (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1997), p.220-221.

²⁶ Wada Makoto, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Samazama na meiro* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1972), pp.274 - 275.

range. There may be a devil. There may be a grim reaper. Or there may be a fairy. They belong to the field of fantasy and not science. There may be thieves and killers that should belong to detective fiction. One realises the meaninglessness of bothering about these genres. In the *otogibanashi* and folk tales that are conveyed from the days of old, many supernatural phenomena occur also, but nobody distinguishes them into categories like science fiction or fantasy. At times, Hoshi's works may occur in outerspace, and other times it may be an ordinary setting, but in any case, they are undoubtedly the works of Hoshi.²⁷

It is possible to pursue the link between Hoshi's works and folk tales, for example, like Wada above, and discover the deeper functions of his works. Kinezumi An, for example, stresses the importance of analysing Hoshi's works in comparison to folk tales²⁸ in other countries, and examining the realities of society.²⁹ Meanwhile, Kida Jun'ichiro gives the title, modern *setsuwa* to Hoshi's works, further elaborating that the *setsuwa* of old contained morals, whereas the modern *setsuwa* have satire and criticism as weapons.³⁰ Tokiwa Shimpei calls them the modern *otogibanashi*³¹ and many other critics give similar names³².

While Hoshi himself uses the word, *minwa*³³ meaning the type of works written by Hans Christian Anderson or the Brothers Grimm, the characteristics common in all of these suggested categories include: (1) the story-telling style; (2) unspecified place names, personal names, and time; (3) fast moving, condensed structure; and (4) a universal element that reveals the naked truths about human nature and society. There may be others that can be added to this list, but the main point here is to show the reason why Hoshi's works have been described by the various abovementioned terms. The listed characteristics of Hoshi's works make them similar to a folk tale (*minwa* or *setsuwa*) and using this term is beneficial for covering the key elements of his work, rather than dealing with genres like detective or science fiction as Wada stated.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Kinezumi An uses the term *minwa mukashibanashi* to mean stories that commonly begin with 'Long, long ago,' or 'Once upon a time'.

²⁹ Kinezumi An, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Gotagota kiryo*, (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1999), p.212.

³⁰ Kida Jun'ichiro, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Dokoka no jiken* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1977), p.318.

³¹ Tokiwa Shimpei, 'Kaisetsu' in Hoshi Shinichi's *Mai-kokka* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1968), p.279. In this case, the word *otogibanashi* is used.

³² The definitions of *minwa*, *setsuwa*, and *otogibanashi* need a more detailed study. For the present, they are loosely categorised as folk tales.

³³ Hoshi Shinichi, 'Atogaki' in *Arifureta shuhō* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1981), p.265.

The Satire in Hoshi's Works

It is now time to examine how the abovementioned characteristics (1-4) allow Hoshi's works to act as convenient mediums for conveying satire. It was mentioned earlier that Hoshi regarded the criticism of civilization to be a desirable element of science fiction. His efforts to do this are apparent and many of his works display a sharp attack on society and its follies.

Ishikawa comments on the abundant warnings for the future contained in Hoshi's science fiction stories as follows.

Hoshi Shinichi divided his usage of the science fiction technique into a sharp weapon for satirising civilisation at times, and at other times into an enjoyable instrument of fun for indulging in fanciful imagination. This can be seen in his collection of short short stories, *Osekkai na kamigami* (The meddling gods) (Shinchosha), or his essay, *Shinka shita saru-tachi* (The evolved apes) (Hayakawa Mystery Magazine Serial). Through the laughter created from the relativisation of values, he continued to maintain a fresh attack at the lukewarm consciousness of everyday life.³⁴

Many of Hoshi's works make the readers just chuckle, while others go deeper and make them thoughtful about society and its people. Without this element, the stories would still be cleverly devised entertainment, but this added bonus gives them perfect flavour. Let us now look at some examples to see how satire is conveyed.

The first short short story is called 'Manē eiji' (Money Age) and is a good representative of Hoshi's short short stories in the science fiction category. Hoshi's science fiction is not concerned with merely robots or space travel, but rather, how these might affect a new age or how people might react and deal with them.

'Manē eiji' focuses on a Japanese family in a futuristic age, where the phrase, *money makes the world go round*, is ironically portrayed to extremes. Although the main character is a young girl, her ultimate dream is to have plenty of money just like her father and all the other adults in her time. Hence, when a day in the life of this girl is viewed through this story, the reader sees that her entire life is concerned with being sad when money is lost, and being happy when money is gained. The story begins with the girl waking up in the morning and seeing her father discussing with a bank representative about opening up a bribery account with a new bank. A bribery account was useful for transferring bribery money which in this world is a regular occurrence. The girl immediately realises that her father is enjoying negotiating a deal too much to keep his promise to take her out for the day. Therefore, she pretends to cry, thus extracting two gold coins in

³⁴ Ishikawa, *SF no Jidai*, p.203.

compensation from him. She decides to go to school seeing as her father is too busy. The girl catches the bus to school and an old lady asks her for her seat.

She took out a silver coin but I ignored her. There was a standard price, after all. Then, the old lady reluctantly took out another silver coin. I stood up smiling broadly.

‘There you are. Have a seat. Take care, won’t you.’

The girl arrives at school and goes to her class. Although the lesson isn’t of much interest, the students have to pay attention if they did not want to pay a fine. The girl is then asked a question by the teacher which she cannot answer. Although she can obtain help from another student who is willing to tell her the answer, the fees for his answers are rather steep so she owns up to the teacher. She then goes to a maths class, her forte, and earns some money for helping other students with answer telling. She then has enough money to pay the teacher for failing to answer the question earlier but when the teacher gives back her test paper with a score of 60%, she must negotiate with another gold coin in order to get 95%. When she returns home, she shows her test result to her father, who gives her three gold coins for doing well. She has come up on top, but realises that if she had studied harder, she would have ended up with more, so decides to study harder in the future. Before bedtime, the girl puts the day’s profits in her large piggy bank and feels genuine contentment at its heaviness and its jingling noise when she moves it. She then leafs through the pages of a calculator catalogue and gets excited at the prospect of getting a junior one which can tell the going rate for fines and how much you can earn at the push of a button. She cannot wait to grow up so that she can use a bribery calculator like her father and feel more excitement and contentment.

It is a life devoid of the Christian ethic, *the love of money is the root of all evils*, and the reader is unimpressed by this immoral future society, but the sad and perhaps frightening thing about the story is that it is not as exaggerated as it may seem. People do not like to admit that money is treated in this way, but in reality, for many people, money is the driving force in their lives.

The young girl’s daily life is a microcosm of the adult version, but her desire for money is effectively making her better behaved. For example, she is resolved to study harder when she is made to pay the fine for being unable to answer the teacher’s question in class. Getting a test score raised by the teacher so as not to be scolded by her father also costs her gold coins and this is another incentive to study harder. At home too, if she is bad mannered, her mother would spank her, and she would need to pay her own mother coins to stop the physical punishment, which again, would hurt her finances. Thus, ironically, money functions to control matters to everyone’s advantage and to provide a peaceful outcome.

‘Manē eiji’ is a good speculative fiction which exaggerates and distorts the present world and portrays a future that may be possible if people concentrated on money obsessively. The speculation in ‘Manē eiji’ is a negative future, even though a crimeless society in which everyone has ample money may seem like Utopia to some. This is because the author’s obvious intention is to mock the money-obsessed society we live in and make the love of money appear ridiculous. A child dreaming about bribery calculators and gold coins overflowing everywhere cannot be a healthy indication of the future.

‘Kata no ue no hisho’ (Secretary on the Shoulder) is a short short story full of charming, innovative ideas to entertain the reader. The opening line of the story describes the main character, Mr. Zame, skating along a plastic pavement on his automatic roller-skates, and immediately the scene is set for an entertaining future age.

Mr. Zame is a salesman and his job is to sell innovative new products door-to-door for his company, New Electro. Although he lives in the future, his job is just like that of any other salesman in the present century. That is, he must sell as many products as possible so as to please his boss. He looks forward to the end of his busy working day when he can relax. Therefore, it is easy for any worker to relate to his situation and enjoy what life could be like with a parrot secretary. The robot parrot sits on the shoulder of every person in Mr. Zame’s future society and communicates to other people its owner’s messages in a polite and pleasant manner. The listener’s parrot interprets this to its owner so that it is in an easy-to-comprehend, condensed version. Therefore, the speaker can avoid having to think of things to say in a socially acceptable manner, and the listener can also get to the crux of the message without having to see through people. In this way, the conversation between Mr. Zame and the housewife to whom he is trying to sell his electronic spider, is described in an amusing manner.

‘This is it. If you have an itchy back, for instance, you just let it loose gently under your clothes and it will reach the right spot on its own and scratch you pleasantly with this hand. It’s a useful item. I brought it over especially, thinking that a refined household like yours should not be without one.’

When Mr. Zame’s parrot finished talking, the woman’s parrot whispered in her ear, inaudible to Mr. Zame.

‘He’s saying, *buy the automatic back scratcher.*’

The woman whispered, ‘Don’t want it,’ so her parrot elaborated on that.

‘It’s wonderful. Your company comes up with new products one after the other. But I’m afraid we can’t afford to purchase such a superior product as that.’

Mr. Zame’s parrot reported in condensed form. ‘She doesn’t want it,’ but when he mumbled, ‘Do something,’ his parrot’s voice became even more enthusiastic.

‘That may be the case, but there is no other product so useful as this. You can scratch your back where you can’t reach, and you can do so in front of guests without them realising. Furthermore, you can avoid any wasted effort. The price has been greatly reduced too.’

‘He’s saying buy it by any means.’

‘What a nuisance,’ said the woman.

The woman’s parrot conversed with her in whispers and then replied as follows.

‘But whenever I buy a product, I always consult my husband about it before I make a purchase. Unfortunately, my husband hasn’t come home yet, so I can’t make a decision now. I will talk to him about it tonight so can you please come back again another time? I would love to have it but I can’t. It is such a pity.’

Mr. Zame’s parrot summarised this for him.

‘She wants you to leave.’

Mr. Zame gave up, and as he put his electric spider back in his bag, he mumbled, ‘Bye.’

The parrot interpreted this politely.

‘I understand. It is indeed a pity. Then, I will call again in the near future. I’m sorry to have taken up your time. Please convey my sincere regards to your husband.’

Mr. Zame left the house, and with his parrot still on his shoulder, he accelerated the engine on his roller-skates again and returned to his office.

Though still entertaining, the English translation does not do justice to the Japanese original, because in Japanese, honorific form is used to convey super polite language on the one hand, and casual speech is used on the other. Hoshi’s ‘Kata no ue no hisho’ presents a situation in which one is spared the bother of having to think of the correct words to say and also having to interpret the true meaning behind other’s words. It is extreme and speculative, and function to ridicule the gap between speech and thought, which humans must deal with as part of every day life.

Conclusion

Hoshi Shinichi may not have become so critical of life had he not experienced misfortune after taking over his father’s company. This opened up his eyes to the world and made him write works that contain a wary outlook on human life and civilisation. Although his stories are often witty and humorous, they can also be intensely ironic. In his science fiction stories, the present world is satirised by portraying a future in which our own world is exaggerated or taken to extremes. The short short story format enables him to present people as stereotypes, thus mimicking the moral fable style. Hoshi’s

characteristic use of letters of the Roman alphabet as names, such as Mr. N, make the characters more like symbols that represent certain types of people. Hence, although to many readers, Hoshi is just a popular writer of science fiction, the satire in his works make it possible to appreciate them at a much deeper level.

The Secretary On The Shoulder

(Translation of Hoshi Shinichi's "Kata no ue no hisho")

Mr. Zame glanced at his watch as he skated along on the road paved with plastic using his automatic roller-skates.

4.30. Should I stop at one more house around here before I go back to the office? This is what Mr. Zame thought, and he reduced the speed of his roller-skates and stopped in front of a house.

Mr. Zame was a salesman. He held a large bag in his left hand. There was much merchandise packed inside. And on his right shoulder, there perched a parrot with beautiful wings. It was true though, that in this age, this kind of parrot perched on the shoulder of every person.

Mr. Zame pushed the doorbell and waited for awhile. Soon, the door opened, and the lady of the house appeared.

"Hello" mumbled Mr. Zame in a barely audible voice. Then, the parrot on his shoulder began talking in a clear voice.

"We are terribly sorry to bother you and take up your time. Please accept our sincere apologies."

This parrot was a robot. Inside it, there was an elaborate electronic brain, a voice maker, and a speaker. Furthermore, it possessed the ability to convey a message mumbled by the owner in more detail.

After awhile, the robot parrot that perched on the shoulder of the lady began to respond.

"Thank you for coming. However, I have a terrible memory and I don't seem to be able to remember your name... I am awfully sorry."

Mr. Zame's parrot tilted its head and whispered in his ear.

"She's asking who you are."

This robot parrot could also convey messages from other people in shortened form.

"I'm from New Electro Company. Buy the electric spider."

In response to his mumbling, the parrot talked politely.

"Actually, I am a sales representative from New Electro Company. You will no doubt be aware already that ours is a company proud of its long tradition and reputation. By the way, the reason I have come to visit you today is for none other but this. I wanted to show you the latest product that the research section of our company has just succeeded in completing. It's this electric spider..."

At this point, Mr. Zame opened his bag, and took out a small metallic gadget which resembled a shiny, golden spider. The parrot talked on.

"It is this. If you have an itchy back, for instance, you just let it loose gently under your clothes and it will reach the right spot on its own and scratch you pleasantly with this hand. It's a useful item. I brought it over especially, thinking that a refined household like yours should not be without one."

When Mr. Zame's parrot finished talking, the lady's parrot whispered in her ear, inaudible to Mr. Zame.

"He's saying, *buy the automatic back scratcher.*"

The lady whispered, "Don't want it," so her parrot elaborated on that.

"It's wonderful. Your company comes up with new products one after the other. But I'm afraid we can't afford to purchase such a superior product as that."

Mr. Zame's parrot reported in condensed form, "She doesn't want it," but when he mumbled, "do something" his parrot's voice became even more enthusiastic.

"That may be the case, but there is no other product so useful as this. You can scratch your back where you can't reach, and you can do it in front of guests without them realising. Furthermore, you can avoid any silly effort. The price has been greatly reduced too."

"He's saying buy it by any means,"

"Shut up,"

The lady's parrot whispered with her and then replied as follows.

"But, whenever I buy a product, I always consult my husband about it before I make a purchase. Unfortunately, my husband hasn't come home yet, so I can't make a decision now. I will talk to him about it tonight so can you please make another call next time? I would love to have it but I can't. It is such a pity."

Mr. Zame's parrot summarised this for him.

"She wants you to leave."

Mr. Zame gave up, and as he put his electric spider in his bag, he mumbled.

"Bye"

His parrot interpreted this politely.

"I understand. It is indeed a pity. Then, I will call again in the near future. I'm sorry to have taken up your time. Please convey my sincerest regards to your husband."

Mr. Zame left the house, and with his parrot still on his shoulder, accelerated the engine on his roller-skates again and returned to his office.

He sat at his desk, pushing the buttons on his electronic calculator, adding up the sales of the day when his section manager's parrot called him.

"Hey, Zame-kun,"

"Oh no, it's preaching time again," muttered Mr. Zame and his parrot replied to the section manager.

"Yes, I'll be right there. I will just finish tidying up here..."

Finally, Mr. Zame stood in front of his manager's desk. The section manager smoked his tobacco and shrouded in the smoke, his parrot spoke matter-of-factly.

"Listen here, Zame-kun. The present state of our company is at a crucial point where we must make a great leap. I think you too are well aware of this. Despite this, looking at your recent results, I would like to think that it could improve a little. One cannot but say it isn't a great pity. I'd like you to recognise this fact and put in your optimum effort."

Mr. Zame's parrot whispered, "He wants you to sell more," and Mr. Zame whispered back, "It's not that easy." The parrot on his shoulder spoke in a meek tone.

"I understand perfectly. I am determined to increase the number of sales too. However, recently, other companies have been using different methods, different items, and doing new things. It is not so easy now to sell. Of course, I will put in extra effort, but I would be most grateful if you could also put in a word to the research production section to make more new products."

The bell rang and it was time to finish work. Oh well, today's work was finished at last. But, going around selling things all day really tired him out. If he didn't drop in at a bar on the way home, he wouldn't be able to unwind. Mr. Zame pushed open the door of Bar Galaxy, which he sometimes dropped into. The parrot on the shoulder of the Madam who saw him enter, welcomed him charmingly. "Oh, Mr. Zame. Welcome. I haven't seen you for awhile. The bar feels somehow empty without the presence of a wonderful man like you..."

For Mr. Zame, this was the most enjoyable time.

Money Age

(Translation of Hoshi Shinichi's "Manē eiji")

It was morning. Waking up to the sound of the electric rooster, I heard the voice of strangers from the direction of the lounge room. When I peered quietly in the direction of the lounge room through the gap in the door, some young gentleman guest had come to see my Daddy. I listened to see what they were talking about.

"How about it? I wonder if you would consider opening a bribery account at our bank also?"

From what they were saying, I realised that he must be a bank solicitor. Daddy shook his head and said.

"But, I've already got a bribery account with the bank I've been using." However, the person from the bank didn't give up.

"That maybe so, but a man like yourself who deals with space trade as an occupation could surely have another account. Also, if you decide to use us, you will find out that our account is extremely fast. With one phone call, it is possible to transfer money into another person's account, and the person will be informed about the deposit straight away. Also, we will send the daily bribery news to you."

"Every bank does that."

Daddy continued to shake his head.

"So, I have something to consult with you now ... if you will open up an account with us ..."

The miniature calculator on the table between Daddy and the visitor began to hum a fresh rhythm.

"About this much, then?"

"Can't you do a little better?" said Daddy, his voice sounding happy. I knew that when Daddy's tone of voice became like this, the negotiations would go on for ages. He promised to take me to the space botanical gardens but it will probably have to be cancelled.

Therefore, I got changed, and entered the living room.

"Good morning, Daddy. Good morning, sir..."

And I began immediately thus.

"... Hey, Daddy. You have the day off work today so you will take me to the botanical gardens, right?"

"Actually, I have work to do now. Let's make it next time, OK?"

It was the reply I expected, so I started moaning straight away.

"That's not fair. You promised, Daddy..."

I tried to cry out in a loud voice. Daddy put his hand in his pocket and took out a gold coin. I stopped crying in one eye. Then, Daddy took out another gold coin, so I smiled at him with both eyes.

"Well, next time, for sure, right?"

I went into the dining room, leaving behind the sound of the calculator, which started up once more. I was so happy to have two gold coins in my pocket that I banged the dining chair and held my breath in fear. If Mummy heard me, she would beat my bottom. To stop her from doing that, I have to give her one gold coin. No matter how happy you are, you have to always watch out for bad manners.

However, Mummy was in the kitchen so I was relieved.

I finished my breakfast, and I decided to go to school. Seeing as I wasn't going to be taken to the botanical gardens, I had no choice.

I was unlucky today because when I left the gate, a bully had been waiting, and said to me, "Hey, you coward,"

I didn't consider myself particularly as a coward, but this was the bully's greeting so there was nothing I could do. Sometimes I think to myself that they should think up some other greeting.

But today it was late. I will be late for school if I haggle with him properly. If I am late, I have to give the teacher two silver coins. So I said to the bully, "Do you have change?"

"Of course,"

Of course, there weren't any bullies who didn't have change, but this was the usual greeting that meant that I would pay. I handed over one gold coin and received nine silver coins. The bully laughed agreeably.

"OK"

"You should stop this kind of unprofitable thing and think of a better method."

"Yeah, but I've got no brains."

It was true that only stupid kids dealt in the bullying trade. If they took too much they would be kept at a respectful distance and they could not make any money, and sometimes they would be reported and most of the money that took so long to earn would be taken away.

The bus to the school was a bit crowded but I managed to find a seat. At the next stop, an old lady got on, stood in front of me, and said.

"Hey, young girl. Can you spare me your seat?"

And she took out a silver coin but I ignored her. There was a standard price, after all. Then, the old lady reluctantly took out another silver coin. I stood up smiling broadly.

"There you are. Have a seat. Be careful, won't you."

I managed to make it to school on time. The first lesson was social studies.

"OK, everyone? What functioned to control society has changed many times throughout the ages. Many things have been tried such as religion, power, ~isms, and science. But, it was money, after all. If society is likened to a machine, money is the lubricating oil and if it is likened to an animal, then it is the blood. Who is that person sleeping over there? You have to listen properly during class even if I am talking about a matter of fact thing."

The teacher advised, kindly. It was the boy at the back. The poor boy will be fined later. The teacher continued.

“Of course, we have the law. However, as everyone knows, although there are jails, there are no prisoners, and although there are execution stands for death penalties, executions are not carried out. People in the past have tried to decide everything based on the law only. It was like trying to operate a machine without the lubricating oil...”

The teacher paused for breath.

“... You all know that the policeman catches everyone who commits the slightest offence, don't you. Of course, it is possible to accept bribery and ignore offences. But, if you do too much of that, your records worsen, your promotion is influenced, and you will be abandoning ways of obtaining more bribery in the future. It is the same with public prosecutors. You must calculate your future when you take bribes from lawyers. There are some prosecutors who send bribes to lawyers and raise their conviction rate because they want to promote themselves faster. The lawyers have to deal with this so the fees run up to a large sum. In short, a criminal offence is definitely unprofitable in this age.”

It wasn't a very interesting talk. But, if I get caught not paying attention, I will have to pay a fine.

“However, it took many years and months for everyone to realise that crime doesn't pay. It was difficult to destroy the idea that bribery was a crime. Incidentally, when there is an incident, there are two other types of people involved in dealing with it. Who are they?” The teacher pointed at me.

“Yes, the judge. He makes the lawyer and the prosecutor come to an agreement and decide on a suitable amount for the fine.”

“That's right. If the fine cannot be paid, then it would result in imprisonment with hard labour or the death penalty, but in the present age where the economy is plentiful and everyone has become clever, the fact is, it never comes to that. Well then, who is the other person involved?”

I couldn't answer. I thought I was going to be taken to the botanical gardens today so I didn't prepare for the class properly.

The kid in front of me signalled to me with his hand behind his back, whether I wanted the answer or not. If I coughed lightly, he would tell me, by moving his fingers. But I didn't cough. His fees for telling the answers were a bit steep lately, so I thought I'd decline him this time.

“I didn't study,” I replied to the teacher. I would have to pay the teacher a fine before I go home. You really lose out when you don't prepare.

“That's no good. It's the witness. You must observe the incident carefully in order to be a useful witness who can receive lots of money. If you make a mistake, you will need to pay a large sum for the fines and lawyer's fees. You must all be always prepared to observe accurately, calculate, and to judge.”

Today there was a maths lesson too. I was good at maths, so I took some answer-telling fees from the kid next to me and behind me. Now I have earned the money for the fine from the social studies class.

After class, I went up to the teacher's room to pay my fine.

“Here, sir. The money from earlier...”

The teacher put it in his pocket. Then he took out the test paper I did the other day and showed it to me.

“Here is the score from the other day. Look, 60%”

“Oh, I got a lot wrong. My dad will be angry if he sees this. Sir, can you do something about this?”

I persisted with my negotiations with the teacher. I lied a bit saying that my dad's fines are really high. But if I say that it's too high, the teacher will see through me and it will be his turn to take advantage of me, so it was very tricky.

After a long time, I paid one gold coin to get 95%. It was too expensive to get 100%, and my dad might smell a rat.

“Thank you sir,”

I said goodbye to the teacher and went home.

My dad was pondering about various things, using his calculator in his room.

“Daddy, I'm back. Look, 95%,” I showed him the test paper I got earlier.

“Is that right? You studied well. Here's your reward.”

Daddy took out three gold coins from his pocket and gave them to me. If I deduct what I gave my teacher, that leaves two. But if I'd studied harder, I wouldn't have had to give the teacher any money. I have to study properly in any case. I will make sure I don't have to pay a fine to the teacher from tomorrow.

Before going to bed, I put the day's profits in a large piggy bank. It has accumulated quite a bit already and I can hardly lift it up by myself. When I pushed really hard, the piggy bank moved slightly and made a jingling noise. It really felt good.

After getting in bed, I leafed through the pages of the calculator catalogue I ordered. It was printed in colour and really pretty. Maybe I will buy a junior one soon. You can find out straight away about the going rate for fines and with the push of a button, you can calculate how much you earned from what. If you miscalculate, you lose out.

At the back of the catalogue there was even a bribery calculator used by adults. It was big and grand. I want to grow up quickly and be able to use one of those!

The electric owl in my room hooted and the lights dimmed. I closed the catalogue and put the futon cover on.

I wonder if I will dream about the bribery calculator and lots of gold coins flowing everywhere? I wish I would. But I wonder what children in the olden days wanted to dream about? And children in the distant future: what do they want to dream about?