

The Early Poems of Kazuko To

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Introduction

In my previous paper, I introduced Kazuko To and the history of Hansen's disease in Japan. However, I was severely hampered by my inability to procure her early works. Previous to her winning the 29th Takami Jun Award in 1998 for her poetry collection 『記憶の川で』 (*By the River of Memories*), she was an almost completely unknown figure inside a world that the Japanese government was eager to hide. Mitsuda Kensuke and others, working to remove lepers from ordinary society, were so successful that a Japanese without any relatives that had Hansen's disease knew next to nothing of the plight of these patients that had been confined due to their illness, and certainly less about the literature published by these captives.

However, through the kind labors of the Minobusan University library staff, I have at last procured the complete collection of Kazuko To poetry up to 1995. This vast collection answers many mysteries and sheds new light on her character and her development as a person and as a poet, but it cannot be discussed fully in one paper. Therefore, I shall simply take up her works in chronological order, spotlighting her in each stage.

In this paper, I would like to introduce and discuss works from her first two poetry collections, 『はだか木』 (*The Naked Tree*) and 『分身』 (*My Fissioned Self*). *The Naked Tree* was published in 1961, when To Kazuko was 32, by 河本睦子 (I don't know whether she pronounces her name Kawamoto Mutsuko, Koumoto Mutsuko or some other way; there is no explanation anywhere how to read the characters). This woman, who took a liking to To Kazuko's poetry, was a third-year student at Oosaka Jogakuin High School (大阪女学院) when *The Naked Tree* was completed. She published the book with the support of her father, who ran a printing company. It was not published for sale. *My Fissioned Self* was published in 1969 by To Kazuko. It was sold for 400¥.

Climbing up to *The Naked Tree*

In Kazuko To's epilogue to *The Naked Tree*, she wrote the following words.

"When I was a girl, I felt a certain longing for the art of literature known as poetry. But at that time, my longing was as yet simply a faint dreaming of an intangible unknown. In reality, I spent my girlhood frivolously wafting along.

I first aspired to literature at the age of 24, and moreover, not to poetry, but to the

type of literature known as tanka.”

(Tanka is a 5-7-5-7-7 syllable poem. Think of it as a haiku with two extra lines. Haiku actually originated from the tanka tradition.)

“In retrospect, I can see that after I became friends with a man who wrote tanka, I learned a lot from his tenaciously strict thoroughness in the selection of words to fit the technique of certain definition used in the tanka form. But afterwards, I kept running into obstacles in the restrictions that the short poem form we call tanka places on us, and at one time, I contemplated giving up literature completely. However, having become accustomed to thinking, I discovered that thinking nothing was a far more difficult practice which left me with a sense of emptiness. And from three years ago, unable to restrain the passionate inner desire to express myself, the scribblings I had made as if whispering to myself came into the form of free poetry. However, my poetic senses seem like stiff buds, still tightly enveloped in ideology. I am looking forward to the time when these poetic senses flower abundantly inside of me. And inside my confined world, poetry is also my neverending cry of demand and desire.” (1)

To Kazuko married Masami Akazawa (赤沢正美) inside Oshima Seishoen (国立療養所大島青松園, the establishment for the care of Hansen's disease patients where she spent most of her life) when she was 22. Masami Akazawa, an avid writer of tanka, was always very strict about Kazuko's poetry. She remembers that when she first met him, she took him a pair of trousers that she had made as part of her everyday chores, and he showed her a book of tanka. She was influenced in her switch to poetry by him; *Les Fleurs du Mal*, a collection of poems by Baudelaire that Masami Akazawa had, inspired her to express herself in that form. He died in the fall of 2000; but a poem she published in 2003 gives us an idea of his relationship to her work. “I always/having labor pains/give birth variously to children that are called poems/And/”This is a healthy child/”This is a somewhat healthy child/”This one was dead at birth/My husband pronounces judgment.” (2) It's interesting that she published this poem two years after his death. Did she feel that even after he died he was present, watching over her work and selecting or criticizing? Or did she write the poem as a tribute to him, celebrating his contribution to her success? In an interview with the Shikoku Newspaper in 2004, she said, “It seems like a dream that he's dead. I have the feeling that this reality is a dream, and there is another reality.” (3)

In the following poem from *The Naked Tree*, we can see how To Kazuko's desire to impress could consume her. Always a passionate woman with a willful side to her, she wants to be number one in the eyes of her beloved.

Desire

Those who want the most excellent things
 Are not all
 Most people are
 Satisfied with any expedience if it proves expedient
 Only
 Those who are able to perceive the excellence
 Fervently long for no less than excellence

What I want is
 To win over the longing of one person
 And to that purpose
 Like the midsummer sun
 An intense impression
 I want to kindle in you
 That
 Even if it's the idiotic love of an idiot
 In the study of life
 I want to measure the combustion of this beautiful love
 This secret desire
 Has caught me and will not let me go (4)

To Kazuko's poetry often reflects the influence of Christianity, but the line "Even if it's the idiotic love of an idiot" uses the Chinese character 愚, meaning "idiot," which has traditionally been used in Buddhist literature to describe those who are not enlightened. For example, a Buddhist monk refers to himself humbly as a 愚 monk, a foolish monk. Those of us living in this world in order to become rich and famous are 愚 people. The choice of this word lets us know that while she has given herself over to this desire, she understands fully that it is not a desire that an enlightened person would have, but a desire of one who clings to the foolish dreams of this floating world.

The next poem reminds us with a vicious slap that To Kazuko was taken from the world she was born in and forced to live in another world at thirteen, an age when she must have been growing out of childhood and entertaining hopes for her future. Her father told her at the time she entered the establishment that she could come home in two or three years; but by the time she wrote this, she had lost hope of returning.

The Sea (originally published in *The Naked Tree*)

No matter how hard I strain my eyes
 I can never see to the boundaries of its extension
 The sea
 With the same color and the same surface
 The sea stretches itself out, ignoring me
 The sea, the sea!
 When I face the sea I am conscious of my sense of hopelessness about my refuted
 destiny and my wasted efforts
 It does not show me the embodiment of
 What should be relying on me
 Its arrogant silence and its flat horizon
 Hate me, want to stir me up
 The injured spot in its calm, composed silence
 That's it
 With my hot blood
 If I could pierce it somewhere with a mighty thrust
 From that spot
 I could surely glance
 Surely
 In those depths
 The tenacious will of the reef that supports you and
 The animatedly flowing passions of the current of the tide
 There must be speculation and ambition in the activities of the gaudy fish tribes
 Despite this
 You only show me an incredibly passionless pale surface
 Flashing a sardonic smile to one cheek
 Still retaining your breadth, the true nature of which can never be known
 Endlessly
 Are you telling me I can only ever run parallel to you? (5)

Whether we are visibly different and separated from society, like To Kazuko, or at first glance perfectly normal-looking people in everyday society, we all have had times when we felt as if everyone else in that big world around us were somehow more perfect.

Imagine how it would feel to have your dreams abruptly rejected by a government which had given political officers the legal right (in the Leprosy Prevention Law of 1907) to order leprosy patients to leave society and enter leprosaria. To Kazuko was born in 1929, long after this law had passed and become a matter of common practice in society. Being told she had leprosy must have been similar to being told one has AIDS in the present society. While cures are being researched, none has been actually marketed for the complete cure of AIDS. To Kazuko entered the leprosarium in 1943, and the drug which cured her and so many others came in 1949. But that did not end her confinement; the Leprosy Prevention Law that held people with a history of Hansen's disease captive was not abolished until 1996. The line "When I face the sea I am conscious of my sense of hopelessness about my refuted destiny and my wasted efforts" in this poem published in 1961 shows us how hard it must have been to adjust to life inside the leprosarium; in the image of a pale, passionless sea stretching without boundaries around her and smiling arrogantly we can see the cold superiority of those who did not suffer from Hansen's disease. In a famous incident in September of 2003, a hotel in Kumamoto refused to let a group of Hansen's disease patients stay in the hotel because "we've heard that infants are easily infected by the disease." Anyone who knows anything about Hansen's disease knows that it's not infectious and that it is now completely curable. But after this incident became public, hate mail and faxes came to the leprosarium with words like this representative one: "First look at your face and body in the mirror. Doesn't what you see make you feel sick?" (6) Many Japanese felt, and some still feel, that a body damaged by leprosy is repulsive and should be hidden from the world. Little wonder that To Kazuko felt estranged from the outside world. In another poem from *The Naked Tree*, she wrote the following words about lipstick: "Burying the dried marks of my disease/ Charming on my lips, the/ Brightness of your gaily colored rouge / As I thought, is forgiving/ My only deceit." (7) How hard it must have been on the adolescent Kazuko.

We can see her loneliness and estrangement again in the next poem.

Sea Anemone (originally published in *The Naked Tree*)

Sea anemone clinging to the wide flat rock
 Crybaby sea anemone
 Because you show a delightful reaction when I touch you with my finger
 I shall recognize your intellect and sharp senses
 But don't sharpen your nerves so

Just a little
 Isn't it all right to keep company with me?
 Just a little
 Isn't it all right to listen to my story?
 I am
 A wanderer without a home to speak of
 I'm a wanderer without any place to go
 A wanderer with nothing to be done but be here doing this
 Don't you think you and I are very similar?
 So
 Even if I taunted you
 Even if you ignored me
 It's nothing but the denial of one existence in the same ring
 So I like to be with you
 You
 Silently peering at the outside world, are the one who emotionlessly understands
 To your cold eyes
 I shall unhesitatingly show my naked self
 If you don't mind
 This exhilarating midday
 Shall you and I not make a bond of our dreams?
 Like the dream of that pale cloud
 Like the dream of the sun shining reflected in the ocean
 A secret from everyone
 On that dry sand
 Shall we not put it together like building blocks,
 You and I,
 To affirm the black point of our existence? (8)

To Kazuko and the sea anemone are two existences in the same ring, two crybabies clinging to an unfriendly home. The sea anemone clings to a bare rock in the impassionate sea; she clings to life in the disinfected leprosarium. She feels that to others, she must wear a mask, a disguise; but to the anemone, which will not judge her, she can show herself as she really is without fear. This distrust of human beings seems only natural under her circumstances; humans took her from her home. Those with Hansen's disease were put on a special train just for Hansen's disease patients, as the

government felt it wouldn't do for them to mix with healthy people. In a famous event of 1922, police in Matogahama burned down a citizen's house. Why did police, who are supposed to protect citizens, perform such an evil act of destruction? Because the house belonged to a leper who begged in the vicinity of a hot springs site that the emperor was to visit, and it wouldn't do for the emperor to see such an ugly sight. No wonder that she finds other living creatures more sympathetic.

In the next poem, the sky plays a similar role to the sea in *The Sea* and in *Sea Anemone*, but we feel that the sky is not a vague entity like 'society,' but rather a more specific entity; for example, 'daily routine in the leprosarium.'

Destruction (originally published in *The Naked Tree*)

Sky, heavy only in sacrifice
 Sky, you've lost your gentleness
 Love will never again come back from there
 Rain clouds drooping heavily
 The brutality of them, continuing without intermission
 This meaningless weight
 Steals my youth from me

This sky will not accept friendliness
 This sky will not understand sadness
 My sky is too dark
 In times of old
 A young lake was sucked up into the sky
 The bottom laid bare, muddying the dried silence in ugliness
 So the sky
 Took up my destiny
 So heavily
 So tired
 It's trying to spill the blood of destruction (9)

In the leprosarium, To Kazuko was assigned the tasks of nursing and sewing. A caption to a picture of a leprosarium sewing room seen in a book of photographs of Japanese leprosaria entitled *A Place to Be for a Hundred Years* reads, "Clothes are reformed to fit the handicaps of the body." (10) That sort of detail reminds us that

Hansen's disease leaves its mark on each body in a different way. To make clothes for a certain person, one would have to know if the body was deformed, and if so, how, and to what extent the person suffered a limitation of movement. Could the person use buttons? To Kazuko herself has bent fingers. In the interview with Shikoku Shimbun mentioned above, she remembers that her labor in the leprosarium was hard work.

The Blooming of Talent in *My Fissioned Self*

The Naked Tree was published in 1961 — as she writes, only three years after she began to write free poetry. In contrast, *My Fissioned Self* appeared in 1969. She had eight years of works as a technically practiced poet to choose from for this collection, which may well explain why it contains many of her very best poems. It was published when she was about forty, an age when the question "Where am I going?" is replaced by the question "Where am I?" In the postscript to *My Fissioned Self*, To Kazuko writes:

"For me, the entirety of this reality is the mother body that gives birth to poetry. In times of pain, the pain becomes nourishment, in times of sadness, the sadness becomes nourishment; and so the poem is conceived, and just like a child who is brought forth as the moon becomes full, one by one these poems were born. In that sense, my poetry is exactly my fissioned self.

But to write is always a severe task; at the same time as it raises the self to a higher place, it divulges the secrets of the self; including one's beauty and one's ugliness, it reveals one's existence."(11)

I lost my beloved mother when I was 41. Perhaps many of you had, or will have, a similar experience. But for those of us with freedom of movement, even though the pain is unbearable, we can at least go to the funeral, pay our last respects, and go accept that our mothers have gone on. To Kazuko was simply given a bone.

Mother (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

Mother

One of the densely growing fruit trees

Residing in that thicket

Given from your trunk

I am a sweetly ripened fruit tree, your descendant

When I close my eyes

In the depths of my depths

There is a palace of homesickness, with its flower unfolding

My heart returns to its home inside of you

Mother

Mine, and yours

The mystery of our secret room of intimacy

From the day I broke out

You and I

Were surrounded by infinite space

Outside each other's skin

Gazing at the distance between us

No way to fill the gap

An individual and an individual

We found that strict separation unmanageable

It was a long time of stoic perseverance, wasn't it

But

Now, in this way, you are

Put into my hand

One light bone

Mother

Sleep silently

You old decayed tree

The origin of the origin of the human species

A portrait

You are hidden under the earth

You live on in me

One nucleus (12)

To Kazuko must have had mixed emotions about her family. The first New Year after she entered the leprosarium, she lied that her father was on his deathbed and went to see her family, but she said, "Both my mother and my father looked more worried than pleased, so I thought I must not return." (13) Her parents cannot be blamed for their worry; in the words of another patient who was institutionalized at sixteen:

"My mother didn't send me to school and didn't let me out of the house, but raised me with great care after I got Hansen's disease as a young child. However, when the war

was approaching, the word spread that Hansen's disease patients were all to be rounded up and institutionalized. The health officers who came into our house, without even lending an ear to my mother's pleas, mercilessly took me away.

When I got sick, our family became outcasts in the village. Neighbors that had been friendly stopped coming by. Other children wouldn't play with my young sister, my brother was bullied, and my older sister, who had been engaged to be married, had her engagement broken and left home. In order to stop the persecution of my family, I determined to enter a leprosarium." (14)

In a 1976 poem, To Kazuko writes of her mother as "My warm birthplace," and in a 1983 poem she writes "From mother to mother/ I arrived in a flow from long ago." (15) We can tell that she always nurtured a longing for the warmth her mother had shown her when she was a child, although there is no evidence that they ever met following her visit home the first New Year's after she entered the leprosarium.

In the next poem, she writes of poetry as if it were sex, and the poems children. From the Talmudic-Freudian point of view, that makes her rather pure. To quote a brief explanation by Erich Fromm:

"Of particular interest is the Talmudic interpretation of symbols. It follows Freudian lines as, for instance, in the interpretation of a dream that someone "waters an olive tree with olive oil." The interpretation is that this dream symbolizes incest. In a dream where the dreamer sees his eyes kissing each other, the symbol means sexual intercourse with his sister. But while symbols not sexual in themselves are interpreted as having sexual meaning, symbols directly sexual are interpreted as meaning something nonsexual. Thus our Talmudic source says that the dream in which someone has intercourse with his mother means that he can hope to have a great deal of wisdom."(16)

Many who have experienced slumps in writing may feel the same way — that out of undecided confusion some spark must occur before writing is born.

That that Gives Birth to Poetry (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

You suddenly

Smile, one rose in the midst of murky confusion

I

Am the female body which cannot be made fertile unless pricked by that thorn

Just because I have given birth before

It is not decided if I will ever bear another unknown number
 Opening the oviduct, the petals stand sharply
 That flower waving in the loneliness of the murky confusion
 One individual will, waiting forever and ever

If only this one corner would burst
 From that opening I could receive the seed that will become you
 Giving birth to a new life
 Oh, I
 Only through giving birth
 Live
 A corpse (17)

As an aftereffect of having had Hansen's disease, her fingers are bent. Lying on her stomach on the floor, she wrote poetry on the back of ads. She sent her poetry to radio and other poetry competitions, and said in an interview with the Shikoku Shimbun that she was very happy when her poems were selected and judged by other people. I find myself comparing her with Yukio Mishima, the famous thoroughbred elite novelist who was always in the foreground of the literary world, always on the front page. He lived in a two story house and wrote in a studio that was solely for him to write in, with a big mirror so that he could look at his body and admire his bodybuilding success. To Kazuko and Mishima Yukio are contemporaries, but while he had all the education and money one could ever hope for, she was taken out of school at thirteen and wrote her poetry in a small shared room. As we can see in the next poem, she wasn't left in peace to do her writing; people came in and out calling her freely. But I find myself thinking that 100 years from now, it's entirely possible that their work will appear side by side in a volume entitled, say, "Great Works of the Showa Period of Japan." This Mishima would have found utterly distasteful!

Name (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

My name
 That sad personal pronoun that is "I"
 I am
 Proven by my name
 Wherever I go

I am, through my name, understood to be me

In my four and a half tatami room

It's often called

I often respond

My familiar little name

From the little road on the edge of the village that was my hometown

My name was a refugee

Oh, but now

My name

Breathes in an enclosed tiny world

Like my shadow

My troublesome and lovable name

If I am, my name is

If I leave, my name will disappear

My evanescent gentle name

Forgotten, then appearing

The only part of myself that I possess

Without it I am not I

Idiotic and laughable

The proof of my harsh existence

In my small room

It's often called

I often respond

My tiny, familiar name (18)

I always wondered how To Kazuko felt about the name "To Kazuko." It was forced on her when she entered the leprosarium; all inmates were given new names. So I was interested to read her comment in the abovementioned Shikoku Shimbun interview that, "I've been writing poetry under the name To Kazuko all this time, so I think I'll just stay To Kazuko." This comment made me feel that she really has abandoned her life before the leprosarium, and accepted her fate. Since her husband is

Masami Akazawa and Japan doesn't allow married couples to have separate last names, her real name might be ○○ Akazawa, but again, I don't know if Masami Akazawa is his real name or not. By reading the messages on a Tokushima Prefecture Hansen's disease support group message site found online (19), we can see that the people who spent their lives in Oshima Seishoen, the institution where To Kazuko lived, have differing emotions. One 77-year-old woman writes, "Even now, in my old age, I have never forgotten my home. My true sentiment is, if I could leave, I would rather not be here." But another person, a 62-year-old woman, writes, "If I were 20 years younger, I think I would have thought of returning to society, but now I can't do anything, and although I wouldn't be treated like a criminal, I think there would undoubtedly be problems in my area. It would be hard to live with the constraints of having to develop new human relationships at this point, and so I think I want to continue my life here." A 69-year-old man writes, "Recently, my brother and relatives worrying about my future contact me with messages like, "Do you want to come back?" but thinking of the area and my impending old age, I can't go back. I have determined to bury my bones on this island." Such complicated emotions lie behind To Kazuko's decision to keep using the name "To Kazuko."

In the next poem, it's hard to tell to what extent the poem is a Christian poem, and to what extent it is discussing private matters. This ambiguity may be intentional; perhaps she wants each reader to be able to read it to the extent of his or her religious inclinations.

Steps (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

It's not failure
 It's a staircase
 What shone on me was
 Not a person who is proud of life in this world
 The perfect you

It's not that I failed
 Now prostrating myself on the staircase to you
 This is a time of trial by being strictly whipped
 People laugh
 At the clumsiness of my life
 But still, it's really not a setback

Because my self that can become clumsy through you
I can love

Lend me your hand
On the cross you
Called to God, the Father; like that
Now I
Am calling you

My self that cannot discard worldly things
So weak when shone on by you
How small
But still, it's not really a setback
Only when you shine on me
I am ugly and idiotic
Because that magnanimous love shines on me
Because I can touch that pure beauty

Oh, that is
On the staircase to you, who are one step higher
I have set my hand
My destitute birth (20)

What she calls her setback, or her failure, is not made clear. Being unable to discard worldly things is a state rather than an event, so while it may be the cause of the event that made her feel idiotic and clumsy, we can't make specific judgments. The mixture of religions again reflects her upbringing; the word "idiot," as mentioned above, and the idea of discarding this floating world come from Buddhism; but she very clearly writes "God the Father" and "on the cross," which cannot be taken in any religious context other than Christian. She was officially Christian. The fact that her husband was living inside the tanka tradition might have influenced her. Tanka have appeared consistently since the Heian period, and many show Buddhist influence. Many famous writers of tanka were also Buddhist monks; in the famous game of 100 tanka, where the caller reads the top three 5-7-5 syllable lines and the players have to pick the correct 7-7 bottom lines, 12 of the 100 tanka are by monks. Perhaps the most famous was the wandering Buddhist poet-priest Saigyō(1118-90), who influenced the most famous haiku

poet, Matsuo Basho, very deeply. For Saigyō, life was a pilgrimage. At least 170 of his poems have been translated, including the following:

Passage into dark

Mountains over which the moon

Presides so brilliantly...

Not seeing it, I'd have missed

This passage into my own past (21)

Even before Saigyō's time, the moon was an accepted image for Buddhist enlightenment. In this poem, the imagery is rather clear: the moon, the light of enlightenment, shines over the dark mountains, and we have the image that by tracking the light through the valleys between the mountains, he can undergo a reflective spiritual journey.

The next poem is one we can all smile at.

Pen (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

No matter how beautifully you dress up

You are laid naked

No matter how hard you try to hide

You can

Never bury yourself

Because you

Only become you by appearing

One wrinkle

And one mole

You cannot hide yourself

Because of your mole

You know that your beauty is marred, but

Transcribing your mole

Because of your wrinkle

You peel off page by page the weight of the past that has supported you

Lovable you

The inner person inside of me

Until this cold surgery ends

No matter how you try to escape

You cannot escape yourself

You are always
 One flat mirror standing gazing at yourself
 One pen, always cold
 You are
 Stabbed with your own pen
 The victim of your words (22)

Of course, the whole poem is superficially a joke, laughing at the poor pen that is laid naked and keeps losing weight. Obviously, she is using a transparent ballpoint pen, like a Bic pen. The big wrinkle that ends in the mole is the ink that ends at the tip, and the tip must always be a mirror directly facing what it has just written. But on a larger scale, To Kazuko herself must be laid naked before a poem can be born. A poem without honesty will seem just that. To complete a work, her emotions must be squeezed out onto the paper, along with the pen's ink. The two go through their cold surgery together, sharing the experience. And after it is written, they see the words on the paper exactly as they appear, for better or for worse. If the surgery went badly and the words must be crossed out, they have to redo the operation together.

Heat (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

What was hiding in the wood
 When rubbed, it became fire

What was hiding in the stone
 When rubbed, it became fire

All visible things
 When rubbed become fire
 It's a lie to say a thing won't become fire when rubbed
 What is really hard
 Sends forth sparks when struck
 But
 All are undamaged by the flames, as
 They only scatter a few sparks
 Wood
 Making an innocent expression as if doing nothing

Before you notice, again returns to the inside of the tree
The stone that only became a small fire
Returns to the inside of the stone
Again making a dour expression as if pondering something
And the fire burning in the fissure of cold knowledge
 They are so well-behaved
Let there be no mistake, they will not be scorched by the fire
The wood and stone on the vast summer earth
A small flame floods
But it's just
That it was constantly hot
My sun (23)

Of course, everything and everyone has a burning point.

Death (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

Death
Death, that secretly snuggles up to me
When life is an ice field of nothingness
You are a Cray-pas
Your quietly blue existence
Is right near me as I am forced to stand in that ice field, and so
I can be conscious of the fact that I am alive

Oh, death, that secretly snuggles up to me
You phosphorescent Cray-pas
Because you are so close to me
I can perceive the freedom of being alive
At any time I can enter into you
For me, you are
A soft resting place
But I
Only when I am by your side and can gaze at you
Feel a sense of boundless security
Because I

Am afraid of losing you inside of you
 You are my aspiration
 Because you are my freedom (24)

A student of Buddhism to whom I showed To Kazuko's works said, "While we stand in life looking at death, To Kazuko stands in death looking at life." Of course, living in a group of people who have a serious disease, it is to be expected that some will die from the disease. But that is by no means the full extent of the story. In the course of the series of trials to make Japan make amends for what it had done to the lives of those with Hansen's disease, which culminated in 2001 with the statement by Prime Minister Koizumi that the government would provide compensation to all patients and former patients, one former patient said the following:

"The suicide of patients was an everyday event.

'Somebody-san has not returned. Please look for him/her.'

When this announcement was made inside the leprosarium, we knew that the person had already committed suicide.

I thought vaguely of suicide many times. My sense of fear that the son I had left in my hometown would be persecuted, and my keen desire to escape my life without hope in the leprosarium urged me on toward suicide.

But as I watched how the families of those who committed suicide were troubled by the event, the thought that I must not cause my family any more trouble pushed me to decide against it." (25)

Whether the person who made this testimony was in To Kazuko's leprosarium or another, the data does not show, but life in any of the leprosaria was difficult. Babies were forcibly aborted and men had to have vasectomies to ensure that the children of these lepers would not be born. Every day had a rigid schedule of labor or sickbed duty. And each leprosarium had its own prison cell. It is no wonder that for a patient, death would seem a warm alternative to embrace, an eternal escape from the hardships of daily life. As I wrote in the previous paper, To Kazuko attempted suicide twice. She comments that after overdosing on sleeping pills, she woke up three days later, but still "days that were somehow blue continued." (26)

Destroy (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

The bulb breaks the earth

The bird breaks the egg

Things that are in shells

Live to break the shell

When my thoughts become firm like gelatin

I ponder the natural force that made me break out from my mother's uterus

To live is to continue destruction

More than now Bigger and bigger

Breezier and with super speed

In the whirlpool of civilization

Humans even now try to continue destroying

To destroy

Looking at yesterday as it goes farther and farther away

Coming closer to tomorrow

I am

"Destroy" – this

Intense word

Welling up inside my body

Putting the first peck into my shell (27)

This may be her only poem that has two lines on one line. Lines are often indented by varying numbers of spaces, and she uses quotation marks now and then, but the fact that she has 'More than now Bigger and bigger' on the same line might mean that she wants us to read faster; that we should be moving towards destruction with great momentum.

Tree (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

Because there was a leaf with wormholes

It was believed that this tree had gone to the dogs

And so

That tree was

Splashed with dirty water and trash

Always leaking sap from its open wound

The tree

Let them do to it what they would

Regarding this tree that was believed to be weak

The surroundings were always cold

It could become very cruel

The tree

Because it always felt cornered

Could only spread its space

But

As the seasons peel off thin layers

At last

It moved on from the season of abundant growth to the season of withering

About when the minomushi basketworm larva's

Cowardly eyes

Began to peek out and pop back into its hanging nest

The tree's

Worm-eaten leaves

Hanging as part of the insect nests

The tree was standing calmly

That was

The tree's love

The tree's revenge

The tree's weapon

The tree

Was only beautiful due to the fact that it was a tree

Regarding the trees without wormholes

Nobody looked back

As if nothing had happened

In the quiet surroundings

One tree

Was towering (28)

Although the actual number of people with Hansen's disease had declined from the

Meiji era, a revision of the Leprosy Protection Law in 1931 encouraged the forcible rounding up of patients and separating them from ordinary society by putting them in leprosaria. After WWI, the government realized that for victory in future battle, it would be necessary not only to think of the present army, but also to raise members of a future army. As part of this, not only Hansen's disease patients, but also tuberculosis patients and those with sexually transmitted diseases were considered societal problems. "It was very different from the separation and confinement until then. Suddenly police officers would come to a house next door that one had been friendly with on a daily basis, and forcibly take a neighbor away. After that, the house would be thoroughly disinfected. This led to a further spread of the idea that Hansen's disease is a terrible disease." (29) The Hansen's disease patients, like trees with wormholes, were different. They had little or no political power; the influence of the communist and socialist parties on the anti-government movements by those in leprosaria has been documented, but neither these movements nor the abovementioned parties ever got any great political clout. So the trees were believed to be weak, and the surroundings could be as cruel as they wanted without much fear of being caught out. A nurse working under Kensuke Mitsuda said, "Even after we had finished preparation for surgery and were waiting, the doctor (Kensuke Mitsuda) wouldn't come, and he'd say things like, 'Something came up that I have to do, so I'll leave it to you' and I performed vasectomy operations on about 70 men." (30) Of course that's completely illegal, and there are many recorded cases of bad aftereffects of these vasectomy operations. The nurse was not licensed to perform these operations. But who was there to complain? The patients and their families had largely cut off ties, and those who worked at the leprosaria had to make a living, so they could not bite the hand of their master, so to speak.

Fear (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

Or maybe

I might have been hoping that it would become that way

I am terribly lonely and cannot get by but

Really

I might have been hoping that it would become that way

One neighbor

Went far away from me and

I am terribly lonely and cannot get by but

The intertwining of emotions that had been too close and were too clear and
 The feeling of release from the arrest of love
 Refresh my heart

It's sad, but as
 The joy of emancipation from the heaviness of always rubbing bodies together
 Runs through the May forest
 Cheerfully bubbling up from my insides
 Really
 I am terribly lonely and cannot get by but
 Vaguely vivid
 In the pleats of emotion
 Betraying even myself
 Smiling in sly arrogance
 There is a green belt (31)

This problem reflects another side to human-human conflict in a confined area. What happened between To Kazuko and her neighbor is not clear, but as a result, the neighbor went away from her. On the one hand, she is lonely; but on the other hand, she feels freed from the mixed but strong emotions she had felt about this person. It takes a lot of courage to admit that. In our society, such an emphasis is placed on getting along with others that even if we feel relieved that a certain person has gone, we cannot voice the sentiment openly. The character 和, used to mean Japan and things Japanese, is translated in the Nelson Japanese-English Character Dictionary as 'peace, harmony, reconciliation, unity.' (32) Japanese often say that Japan has to be a land of harmony because it was a farming country, and farming requires the work of more than one person, while in countries that were originally hunting countries, one can be individualistic. Here To Kazuko is in the land of unity and harmony, smiling slyly when her joy that someone is leaving betrays her attempts to put on a sad facade.

Stance (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

On the earth
 Casting a dried shadow
 The bare tree
 Stands at the entrance to a harsh season

Like one who has cut his ties with yearnings for life
 The silent object
 Enveloped in its mysterious sense of purity
 Bare tree
 Your leaves turn color
 They were beautiful at the moment of separation
 In that quite proper stance
 The season of budding and
 The vicissitudes of the season when leaves fall and disappear visit you
 By being placed in the wind
 And snow
 You
 Add another large annual tree ring

Bare tree
 Poet in silent meditation
 I like the classic romantic flowers
 Gaudier
 Until the season when they bloom and give off their sweet aromas
 Close your eyelids and think (33)

Here we see the theme of survival, not just scraping away with a life, but bearing oneself proudly throughout hardship. In the style of classical Japanese poetry, while she does not use the word 'winter,' it is clear what the season is, and the season and the theme of the poem are in harmony.

The Metaphysical Flower (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

If there were a flower
 When was it
 Assuming there was a flower
 When was the peak of its bloom?
 From the darkness
 At the time when it opened its eyes in the faint light
 It was gradually led into the bright afternoon
 From that time, somehow

It stood amidst a confusion of noise as if it was being secretly applauded but
 Maybe it was then

But

Still we don't know whether it was a flower or not
 Death
 When it seemed a far thing
 It can be thought that it was only a bud and then
 When it seemed to be right nearby
 Maybe that was the flower
 Some such thought blurs the mind
 If we don't live until the end
 We can never know which was the true flower

People were

Always whispering in front of the tombstone
 Yes, that was that person's flower
 Maybe
 The person who died never even noticed the flower but
 They point it out so easily
 Like a light shining vividly after it has become dark
 Making only the flower float up from death

Flower

A gentle word
 On a strict footprint
 Something giving off an aroma with a slight whiteness
 My flower
 When I try to see it
 Enveloped even more in the thick desire for life
 Becomes impossible to see (34)

As mentioned above, death was a common thing in leprosaria. A sad fact about the Japanese leprosaria is that due to real names being taken away and due also to the stigma attached to the disease, there are over 20,000 jars filled with the bones and ashes of people that nobody came to collect and bury. In the book *An Easy Understanding of Hansen's Disease*, the following sentence appears. "Even after the

restraining laws regarding Hansen's disease patients were repealed, close to 90% of those who die in leprosaria are put in the leprosarium crypts." (35) In the many eulogies, a certain stage in the person's life was often pointed out as the flower of that person's life. But was there ever really a flower? Was there a possibility that the person could ever really flower to the full extent of his or her potential, living in confinement? And we may wonder further; what are the flowers of our own lives?

The Conditions for Beauty (originally published in *My Fissioned Self*)

Round

Calmly round

Richly round

What a soft touch round things have

The one teacup now in my hands is

Gracefully calm

It urges itself on me with its pleasant weight

Round things

Are beautiful because of their perfection

Round things

Are loved because of their roundness

But

When chipped, instantly are sharp

And

To the extent that their shape is distorted

Sharpen and become poorer

Don't chip

When you've chipped

That is already

Just rubble that fails to achieve the conditions for beauty

That rubble

Is abandoned in the midst of the rubble

Where it chipped and is sharp

It shines painfully

The part that has become poorer

Makes it stand out even more (36)

The smooth surface of a round ball versus the irregular flatness of a ball the air has gone out of, or the soft roundness of a baby's cheek versus the pockmarked cheeks of a lifetime smoker that has become old — these symbols of the law of entropy we react to unconsciously, having been brainwashed from our youth by picture books in which a ball must be a perfectly round ball, and a face a perfectly smooth face. In Japan, only the perfect blossom and the perfect fruit can be sold; anything less is considered below sale value. But just as the worm eats the apple, Hansen's disease ate away at the perfection of human features. The worm-eaten apple is thrown away, and the disfigured Hansen's disease patients are cast aside by society. This theme appears many times, as in Tree, translated above. When chipped, they become sharp. They know that they will be the objects of prejudicial actions, and it is easy to lose one's pride and become unable to take a proper stance. Those who suffer from long illness are also likely to become ill-tempered due to their frustration. But even if the body chips, it must be possible to maintain the perfect form of the spirit, if one tries very hard. A sharp temper can only make one uglier.

Conclusion

The more I research To Kazuko and the history of Hansen's disease in Japan, the more it becomes clear that there are many stories left to be told. Because the majority of patients who went through the age of confinement with To Kazuko are now very elderly, there is a grave fear that data will be lost and stories will disappear. There is also the problem that due to years of such behavior, many fear that if they speak openly, some form of retaliation will occur. The head of one leprosarium publicly stated that if the plaintiffs (the patients) won their lawsuit against the government that had confined them, he would be forced to reconsider their treatment. Of course the judge swiftly asked him about this remark, and he changed his official statement, saying that treatment would not be changed — but still, one can see why many patients and ex-patients are very nervous regarding public declarations. While they are now free to leave, most of them have nowhere to go.

This lack of information, this inability to get the full story, make it all the more important that the messages we do have, such as those contained in To Kazuko's beautiful poetry, get out into the world. I hope that someday the world will know more about her, and she will be recognized as what she is — as one of the greatest poets in Japan.

Notes

- (1) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.92-93.
- (2) “Birth,” from 今日という木を. A full translation can be seen in “Freedom Within Confines: The World of Kazuko To,” by Jill Emma Strothman, 身延山大学仏教学部紀要第6号、2005年.
- (3) 2004年2月20日四国新聞掲載「青い鳥さがして」第4部「絶望から希望へ」(15)
- (4) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.33-34.
- (5) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.35-37.
- (6) 「ハンセン病元患者の宿泊拒否事件は社会の偏見に対する国の責任問題です。」(日常生活の中の差別(72))、クロワッサン、2004年3月25日号.
- (7) “Lipstick.” A full translation can be seen in “Freedom Within Confines: The World of Kazuko To,” by Jill Emma Strothman, 身延山大学仏教学部紀要第6号、2005年.
- (8) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.44-46.
- (9) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.53-54.
- (10) 百年の居場所、太田順一著、開放出版社、2002年、p.15.
- (11) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.284.
- (12) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.101.
- (13) 2004年2月20日四国新聞掲載「青い鳥さがして」第4部絶望から希望へ(15)
- (14) From the website 「ハンセン病患者・元患者の人権回避」、厚生労働省, at <http://www.mhlw.go.jp/houdou/2003/01/h0131-5/jinken.html>.
- (15) “Dominion” and “Voices from Afar.” Full translations can be seen in “Freedom Within Confines: The World of Kazuko To,” by Jill Emma Strothman, 身延山大学仏教学部紀要第6号、2005年.
- (16) Dream Interpretation, by Erich Fromm, as published in the 15th edition by 英宝社、平成9年、p.28.
- (17) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.107-108.
- (18) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.121-123.
- (19) The site is compiled by 徳島県ハンセン病援護協会 and can be found at <http://www1.quolia.com/hansen.s.k428/message.html>.
- (20) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.126-128.
- (21) 西行、英訳 William LaFleur, published in A Reader's Guide to Japanese Literature, J. Thomas Riner, published by Kodansha International in 1988, p.53.
- (22) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.132-134.
- (23) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.140-142.
- (24) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.149-150.
- (25) 楽々理解ハンセン病、武村淳著、花伝社、2001年、P.21.
- (26) 2004年2月20日四国新聞掲載「青い鳥さがして」第4部絶望から希望へ(15).
- (27) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P.172-173.

- (28) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P. 182-185.
- (29) 90年目の真実、「らい予防法」遼憲国家賠償請求西日本弁護士団著、かもがわ出版、1999年、p. 114.
- (30) 90年目の真実、「らい予防法」遼憲国家賠償請求西日本弁護士団著、かもがわ出版、1999年、p. 119.
- (31) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P. 191-192.
- (32) The Modern Reader's Japanese-English Character Dictionary(second edition), by Andrew Nathaniel Nelson, Ph.D., published by the Charles E. Tuttle Co., Inc., 1984 printing, page 664.
- (33) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P. 225-227.
- (34) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P. 237-239.
- (35) 楽々理解ハンセン病、武村淳著、花伝社、2001年、P. 13.
- (36) 塔和子全詩集第一巻、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2004年、P. 254-256.

All To Kazuko poems and all quotations were translated by Jill Emma Strothman. All materials except those noted in (16), (21) and (32) can only be found in Japanese.

【キーワード】 塔和子

ハンセン病

詩