

Freedom within Confines : The World of Kazuko To

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I. Introduction

In 1929, a girl was born in Ehime Prefecture in Japan. As a child, she was loved and cared for by her family, just as ordinary children are. In her childhood, Kazuko To had no way of knowing that a terrible fate was to befall her. It came in 1943, when she was found to have leprosy, now known as Hansen's disease. According to the leprosy policy of the time, she was then forced to part with her family, and put into a national institution for lepers. I hesitate to use the term 'leprosarium' because these institutions were more like life imprisonment establishments. Once put in, it was next to impossible to leave, even if fully recovered. Institutionalized people who were healthy enough were required to do hard labor for long hours every day, and punished if they objected. These institutions were completely isolated from the outside world, so most Japanese knew next to nothing about the terrible infringements on human rights that were daily procedure there.

During the past 10 years or so, Japanese have come to realize how little they know about the society that arose inside the world of Hansen's disease institutions; and one big surprise was the abundance of literature produced by patients and former patients. As many of these victims of society were institutionalized before they completed their education, many people suppose that they were undereducated and therefore not likely to produce great literary works. However, the poems of Kazuko To, which only recently became known to those with no connection to the confined world of Hansen's disease patients, express a beauty and sensitivity that far surpasses expectations. Competing against all poets, her poetry collection 『記憶の川で』 (By the River of Memories) was selected for the 29th Takami Jun Award, no small feat for a 69-year old former Hansen's disease patient who had spent the past 56 years in such severe conditions.

I first ran across Kazuko To's poetry one day when a eugenics lecturer from Waseda University casually handed me a print he was going to use in the next class and said, "Do you know her?" I didn't, and most westerners don't, because Japan was eager to hide its

lepers from the West. But it's time for us to discover this hidden world.

II. The History of Leprosy in Japan

The earliest written record of leprosy in Japan is found in the Yororei(『養老令』) of 718. In the section it appears in, the Yororei divides symptoms of various diseases into different levels of handicap in a rather matter-of-fact manner, which naturally leads to the presumption that at the time leprosy was not an unknown rarity but a disease visible in ordinary society. The word 「癩」, meaning "leprosy," first appears in 833 in the Ryonogige (『令義解』), in which it is reported to be easily transmitted and caused by insects eating internal organs. In the Middle Ages, lepers lived in groups known as 非人集団, literally "groups of non-people." Takehara's Japanese-English Dictionary defines 非人 as "a beggar; a pariah; a person outside the pale of humanity." Within the group, the leaders were known as Chori (長吏), the middle group was comprised of beggars and the handicapped, and the lowest level was the lepers. Interestingly, it has been mentioned that the Chori actively recruited lepers because their disfigurements made the group appear more pitiful and therefore needing charitable donations.

From the mid-twelfth century, leprosy is represented in Buddhist works as a 業罰, a punishment for the sins of one's ancestors or oneself, a result of one's karma. For example, the medical manual Tonisho(『頓医抄』), written in 1303 by a Buddhist monk who was also a doctor, reports that leprosy is "divine punishment by gods and Buddhas as a result of the sinful acts of one's ancestors."¹ Of course, in the era before scientific research flourished, such ideas were common. The Christian Bible also held leprosy to be a disease related to sins, leading to discrimination that can be seen until quite recently. For example, in Kai Lung's *Golden Hours*, a novel written by English humorist Ernest Bramah in 1922, we find the sentence, "If an evilly-disposed one raised a sword to strike this person, but was withheld before the blow could fall, none but a leper would contend that because he did not progress beyond the intention thereby he should go free."² In this work, the phrase "none but a leper" puts lepers on a plane apart from humanity, as with the Japanese term non-person.

The arrival of Christianity in the 16th to 17th centuries brought with it the idea of working toward one's own salvation through helping those in need, and to this end, both the Societas Jesu and the Ordo Fratrum Minorum (Franciscan Order) established

hospitals for those with leprosy. Frances of Assisi (1172-1226), originally a rich playboy, awakened to Christianity and his mission to serve God at age 23 after divine power led him to a Hansen's disease patient, whereupon he got down from his horse, kissed the patient's hand and gave a monetary gift; so as a natural turn of events, the fathers of the Franciscan Order continue trying to aid lepers all over the world. This ministry was in sharp contrast to older Japanese religious groups, which tended to either just give charitable donations or to ignore the problem of leprosy. According to the Buddhist record of Buddhist welfare activity 考察仏教福祉, lepers were focused upon three times before the Meiji era: first, the Empress Komyo, famous for bathing with lepers, became the first leader in the movement towards the salvation of lepers when she established the 非田院施薬院, a care institution, in 758; next, the great monk Eison(教尊, 1201-1290) and his disciple Ninjo(忍性, 1217-1303) worked toward the salvation of the lepers who lived in the 「北山十八間戸」, a section of Nara, and established a care institution for lepers; and last, in 1390, it is reported that lepers were given a bath by those of the temple 遠江方広寺 (p.19, 25-26 and 28). It is interesting to note that while both Buddhism and Christianity considered leprosy to come from personal sins, Christians continuously worked toward the salvation of lepers, while with Buddhism, the movement came and went in spurts.

Proceeding from the Middle Ages (中世) to the Modern Era (近世), the appellation used for lepers changes from non-people to monoyoshi (物吉, literally translated "auspicious thing"). They appear in various works wandering the countryside soliciting contributions, a sight which continued to be visible even in postwar Japan. Some also worked in fields, and some made Japanese sandals for a living. While their village was separate, it was open, and people could move freely in or out.

In the Edo Period, leprosy was thought to be an inherited disease rather than an infectious one, which made it much easier for lepers to work in ordinary society. The General Survey of Leprosy done in 1919 by the Ministry of Home Affairs reports that in Kyoto, 118 lepers mostly in their 20's to 30's lived at home with their families, and many were the main financial supporters of their families.

In this way, through the ages, we can find records of leprosy in Japan continuously for the past 1300 years, and during most of that time, lepers were accepted as a part of society. They were discriminated against in many ways, but there was no movement to actually isolate them from the rest of society until about a hundred years ago.

In the end of the 1800's, a new wave of leprosarium building began. Most of these

movements were led by foreign Christian leaders, but the first was opened in 1875 by a Japanese doctor of Chinese medicine, and the last was created in Minobusan by a Nichiren Buddhist monk.

The first legal discrimination against lepers began with the passing of the first version of the Leprosy Prevention Law in 1907. This law required doctors to report any case of leprosy, and endowed political officers with the right to order leprosy patients to enter leprosaria. To this end, national leprosaria were opened, but in the beginning, they could only house 1100 patients altogether, while the actual number of patients was reported at 30,000. The book "How to Teach Hansen's Disease" states that regarding the tiny 3.7% rate of leprosaria housing, "The figures were so low because the ministers of the Ministry of Home Affairs knew that the infectivity of the disease and the possibility of breaking out with it were weak."³ In 1916, the right to impose disciplinary punishment was given to leprosaria directors. This culminated in 1938 with the construction of the maximum confinement facility known as Jukanbo, built in Kuryu Rakusen-en, a national leprosarium in Gunma. Imprisonment in Jukanbo could last up to 500 days, and the temperature went down to -20°C in winter. Patients only received two small meals a day, and so not surprisingly, 22 of the 93 imprisoned in Jukanbo died of simple causes such as cold or undernourishment or committed suicide.

The Leprosy Prevention Law was revised several times, limiting the rights of patients more and more. The vasectomization of male patients that was begun by anti-leper movement leader Kensuke Mitsuda in 1915 was legalized in 1948 in the Eugenic Protection Law. This law also legalized the abortion of children of lepers.

In 1949, dapsone, a drug to cure leprosy, became available in leprosaria, and after that, leprosy became a curable disease. The World Health Organization recommended outpatient treatment in 1961, but it was not until 1996 that the Leprosy Prevention Law was abolished. Those 47 years of continued restriction between the time when leprosy became curable and the time when the law was abolished cannot be forgiven.

Lawsuits against the state and the Diet began in 1997, and the Government was ordered to pay compensation to Hansen's disease patients and former patients. In 2001, in his Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi Concerning the Swift and Comprehensive Solution of the Hansen's Disease Issue, Koizumi resolved that Japan would not appeal the ruling of the Kumamoto District Court, and would provide compensation to all patients and former patients. He writes, "Bearing seriously in mind

that former policies adopted by Japan in the admitting of patients of Hansen's disease to facilities restricted and limited the human rights of many patients, in addition to the severe prejudice of society in general and the discrimination that has existed, the government has deeply reflected on the pain and suffering experienced by patients and former patients alike and would like to offer an honest apology to those people and condolences to those who have already passed away after much suffering and resentment."⁴

Because the term Hansen's disease is now preferred by patients to the older term of leprosy, I will use it in the remainder of this paper.

III. The Personal History of Kazuko To

People with Hansen's disease were forced to assume a new name upon entrance to leprosaria, and because there was such a stigma attached to the disease, it was common for families to renounce a relative who was known to have been taken away to one of the Hansen's disease establishments. Therefore, it is difficult to obtain private information about the families of most patients, but in the case of Kazuko To, we can learn many details through her poems. This poem, "Bonfire," comes from her sixth poetry collection, Ichima Doll, and functions as a rough sketch of her family as she remembers it from before she became ill.

Bonfire⁵

When fallen leaves are burned
 There is a pleasant memory tickled by the smell
 This same fire crackled
 In the hearth of my old home
 From gas fires and the fires of electric stoves
 The smell of a bonfire differs slightly
 My father and mother and
 Eight brothers and sisters were brought up around that fire
 That old man in the neighborhood
 That old woman
 Sat around that fire telling tales of the past

At that time

My older brother had gone to Manshu, my older sister to a girls' school in a faraway town

Me and

One younger brother and two younger sisters

Still younger siblings not yet born

The popping sound of the bonfire

Suddenly brings back the hand of my mother putting firewood into the fire

The flames remind me of the kettle hung on the pot hanger and

The faces around the hearth

The fallen leaves

Smoke rising as they burn

My father and mother died

My brothers and sisters are living more separated than the dead

That house, with no one in it

Still with so many memories locked inside

I suppose it is silent

I am

Enveloped in the scent of the bonfire

Faraway memories and illusions

Like a young girl warming her breast with a roast sweet potato

I am secretly warming

From this poem, we understand that she comes from a large family belonging to a social class rich enough to send its children to a faraway school for a better education, but down-to-earth enough that visitors from the neighborhood felt free to drop by and talk leisurely around the fire. She associates her mother with feeding the fire; we see her mother as the personification of warmth and maternity. It is written in her poems and in her interviews that even after she entered the institution, her father came to see her, and worried about her in the usual way. To Kazuko was much luckier than many in that respect; Hansen's disease patients were often rejected by their families, partly because of the eugenics movement that arose around World War II. At that time, a prevailing sentiment in Japan was that a person's worth was directly connected to his/her ability to serve the state, and therefore, Hansen's disease patients had little or no societal value.

Another factor leading to the prevalence of patients being cast away by their families was that if a person was known to be related to a Hansen's disease patient, marriage became difficult or impossible and employment problems likewise arose.

When Kazuko To was 38 years old, her father died, and as her mother had died previously, she felt her only tie to the outside world had been cut. In an interview by Shikoku Simbun, she relates her emotions of the time as follows: "Nothing will ever change in a place like this, so I thought death would be better."⁶ Also experiencing slumps in her poetic activities, she attempted suicide twice, taking an overdose of sleeping pills. But she was saved both times, and when she received the Jun Takami Award for her 15th poetry collection, she happily said to her doctor, Kazuko Sugiyama, who had talked her through her times of trouble, "I could experience the joy of today only because I was alive."⁷ After considerable time elapsed, a younger brother, who was told by their father that he had an older sister living in Oshima Seimatsuen on the father's deathbed, came to visit sometimes, bringing her favorite sweet potato tempura as a present. The above poem was written in 1980 when she was about 51, and contains the line "my brothers and sisters are living more separated than the dead," so it would seem safe to assume that this younger brother had not yet looked her up at that point in time.

We can see the change in Kazuko To as a woman through her poems. In "Lipstick," from her first poetry collection The Naked Tree, published when she was about 32 years old, she retains lingering traces of girlhood. She is self-conscious, seeking forgiveness for her defects.

Lipstick⁸

Lipstick is
 Sheathed in its metal case, putting on airs
 Lovely as the fruit of the heavenly bamboo when taken in hand
 Tickling the depths of my breast
 You, with your solid block of oil and gaily colored rouge, know everything about me
 So when I am with you
 I can feel so at ease

The passion that eagerly seethes in the depths of my breast

The clear blue reason like a knife
And the tenacious obstinacy that sticks to me like fat

You know them all
And especially, my conceit as I look into the mirror
I am thankful that you forgive
So when I am with you
I can call back peace of mind from the evening sky

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
Clinging to a beauty that obeys no laws

Here, she wants to look pretty, to hide the scars on her lips and to attract. She feels at ease only when she is satisfied with the reflection in the mirror. She is very much a young woman in love with romance. But as she ages, such frivolous sentiments change. She becomes less a woman, more a part of her new family.

Marriage was common in Hansen's disease establishments, and Kazuko To married Masami Akazawa, both a patient and a writer of Japanese poetry, when she was 22. However, as was standard procedure upon such occasions, her husband was forced to have a vasectomy, so they were eternally childless. As Kazuko is not a politician by nature, she is prone to avoid harsh political criticism; and as the book An Easy Understanding of Hansen's Disease succinctly summarizes it, "Those institutionalized closely watched the expressions of the staff members, cowering in fear of the arbitrary application of their right to disciplinary action."⁹ But we can find testimony to the situation of married people with Hansen's disease in other works. Koshio Yakushiji, who was born in the same year in the same prefecture as Kazuko and was institutionalized into the same institution at a close point in time, gives us details.

"I married in 1954. It was a 'commuting marriage,' in which I spent the night in a 24-tatami

room where 14 women lived. At night the number was doubled because of the husbands. We knew if anyone got pregnant the baby would be aborted. Even if we wanted to somehow save our children, abortion was forced on us. They even arbitrarily chose the hospitalization date.

"That summer. I remember it was at the peak of the heat. My wife was forced to have an abortion. The child was a girl. Later, the nurse told me that it cried properly at birth. I was called to the medical office. They handed me a plastic bag with the umbilical cord and the placenta in it. Blood was mixed in. I was told to take care of it myself.

"It was in the evening, when passersby became few, but the summer heat remained. On the coastline that was a part of the institution, in a place that would not be covered by waves even at high tide, I dug a hole as deep as my knee and buried it. 'I have done an awful thing to my daughter. I shall never again force such sadness on my wife.' Thinking that, I had a vasectomy.

"The next year, when my mother came to see me, I told her about the abortion. 'I would have wanted to raise her,' she said, crying." ¹⁰

The concept of marriage changes dramatically in situations where childbearing is not a fundamental goal of the marriage, as was popular with the so-called DINKS (double income no kids) of a previous generation. The case of Hansen's disease patients is similar; marriage is a promise of friendship, love and support to the spouse. In the case of Kazuko To, she writes time and again that her husband is always the first to see her poems, and she only publishes the ones he likes. She also writes about how she took care of him after he became blind, and it is clear that he was the most important pillar to her emotionally.

Many years after "Lipstick," the Kazuko who appears in the seventh poetry collection, published when she was about 54, seems quite different. This poem expresses the sentiments of a mature woman who has come to grips with a destiny that was forced upon her. We can see her spiritual growth in the fact that she has stopped looking at a situation solely from her own point of view; she considers her husband's emotions as well.

Voices from Afar ¹¹

From mother to mother

From mother to mother

I arrived in a flow from long long ago

Amid a thicket of people

I was cast out
As an individual branch of the thicket
Although I am no longer connected to any other part
Voices come from somewhere far off
Today I have
Maternal instincts that exist to be passed on to the next generation

You
Your paternal instincts too
Have you received their blood, flowing to you ?
We Hansen's disease couples cannot bear children
To that voice from afar
We raise our ears like rabbits
Only listening
Standing still to dam the flow
The heaviness
Pierces us in a moment of transparency

Here we see the Kazuko who has reached middle age, who is no longer girlishly concerned with her reflection in the mirror but is lamenting her inability to become a mother and a grandmother. She looks at time as an everlasting river of which her life is but a tiny part, and laments her inability to continue the flow. The phrase "standing still to dam the flow" expresses her sense of utter powerlessness; no matter what the case, the staff of the Hansen's disease institutions would not allow children to be born. So as the patients in the Hansen's disease institutions grew older and older, the chirruping voices of children became a rarity. Originally there were schools in the institutions, but this became unnecessary as patients who were still of schooling age disappeared one by one from each institution.

As mentioned previously, Kazuko To is not usually a political speaker; she is more interested in the inner voice of the soul. However, some of her greatest poems contain sharp political statements. The poem "The Locust," which has been used to teach elementary school students about Hansen's disease, was published in 1983, after Hansen's disease became completely curable but before the abolition of the Hansen's disease laws.

Our best clue as to how Kazuko suffered under the Hansen's disease policies, it ascribes to the locust the sentiments of a person who suffered greatly but has finally achieved freedom.

The Locust ^{12'}

There it was dark
There we consumed
Only the juice of tree roots
There seemed endless
We thought we would never see a day in the sunshine
How bright it is here
That the day would come when we could live lifting our voices to our heart's content
Those long days and months
We could never even imagine
With our many comrades
We can raise our voices as we like
How wonderful it is to have a voice
We never knew
There
Even if there was something we wanted to say
We put up with it silently
Even if we raised our voices
We were closed in on all sides
Ah
Receiving sunshine fully
Loving
Giving birth
Praying
This is a paradise of brightness and greenery
In that dark season
Who knew that such a wondrous day would arrive
What divine Providence can it be by

Who cares if life is but three days

Now

Our eyes, shivering with the excitement of being alive

Let us open as wide as we can

The message is clear; Hansen's disease patients were forced to go through a long dark period of rejection and discrimination from society, and finally they have reached the stage where they can raise their voices and be heard. In the really dark age of Hansen's disease institutionalization, arbitrary punishment which could lead to death had been used for just about any kind of uprising; for example, the famous -20°C prison cell in Jukanbo can in no way be considered an example of humane punishment. This oppressive atmosphere led many to commit suicide, and one patient writes that whenever there was an announcement that someone was missing, everyone knew he/she had committed suicide; and such announcements were an everyday affair. But the Japanese society came to admit the rights of the patients more and more after it became a completely curable disease, and it became known that in the long history of institutionalized care of Hansen's disease patients, not a single staff worker came down with the disease. There had really never been sufficient cause for the country's paranoiac fear of the disease; it was a big scam led by the government. As one lawyer after another came to see this, offers of legal help became more and more numerous, and finally, this movement led to the great legal victories of the patients and former patients which began in 2001. Then was the locust finally freed.

IV. Basic Characteristics of Kazuko To's Literature

Japanese literature from its dawn has been closely tied to nature. Arising as it does from the Chinese literary tradition, it has roots in such famous poets as Tu Fu(712-770) and Li Po(699-762). One short example by Tu Fu is the following "Looking Out Over the Plains."

Looking Out Over the Plains¹³

Clear autumn, sight has no bounds

High in the distance piling shadows rise.
 The farthest waters merge in the sky unsullied;
 A neglected town hides deep in mist.
 Sparse leaves, which the wind still sheds,
 Far hills, where the sun sinks down.
 How late the solitary crane returns!
 But the twilight crows already fill the forest.

Similarly, we can find such examples in the first great poetry collection of Japan, The Ten Thousand Leaves. The famous Princess Nukada, whom the renowned Ten Thousand Leaves specialist Ian Levy calls "Japan's first lyric poet," wrote the following poem/during the reign of Emperor Tenji(661-671) in answer to the question of whether she preferred spring or fall.

When spring comes,
 bursting winter's bonds,
 birds that were still
 come out crying
 and flowers that lay unopening
 split into blossoms.
 But, the hillsides being overgrown,
 I may go among the foliage
 yet cannot pick those flowers.
 The grass being rank
 I may pick
 yet cannot examine them.

Looking at the leaves of the trees
 on the autumn hillsides,
 I pick the yellowed ones
 and admire them,
 leaving the green ones
 there with a sigh.

That is my regret.

But the autumn hills are for me.¹⁴

The question of whether spring or fall was more beautiful was a classic topic of conversation for the Heian courtiers, and was of course summed up in the Pillow Book by Sei Shonagon in her famous statement that every season has a perfect time of day in which it excels over any other season. This focus on seasonal beauty naturally lead into the basic tenet of the famous Japanese poetry style of haiku that a proper traditional haiku requires a seasonal word. Kazuko To was strongly influenced by her husband, Masami Akazawa, who wrote in the traditional 5-7-5-7-7 syllable pattern of Japanese poetry known as tanka, which also tends to express delicate seasonal beauty, so it is no surprise that she tends to write about natural phenomena in her poetry. But while it is literarily incorrect to impose emotions upon objects in the world of haiku, Kazuko To exploits this device in her poetry. In this she leaves Japanese literary tradition and branches out on a new limb. "The Locust," mentioned above for political reasons, is one such example. Let us look at a different type of personification she uses in the poem "Gnarls."

Gnarls¹⁵

When I touch the gnarl of a tree
 There is a deep, deep weight
 Communicating a sadness from far away
 Having withstood stark blizzards
 Modestly
 Singing to itself of victory
 The gnarl continued to heal the wound within
 The gnarl is
 A scar
 But yet
 Beautiful
 More than any other tree
 You with your many gnarls stand out in appearance

Hurt and hurt again, but still
Continued to heal
The loneliness of your eternally gentle presence
Charms me
Ah
To the never over-stretching
Beauty of your stability
I want to render my all and go to sleep

In the case of "The Locust," she used a first-person approach, using the voice of the locust to express her own thoughts. But in "Gnarls," from her first poetry collection The Naked Tree, she is first looking at one gnarl and touching it, then speaking to the tree as a whole. Here she is outside the gnarl, viewing the record of its suffering and healing as we might read a book about a sufferer of Hansen's disease. In "Voices from Afar," she said that she was cast out to become a part of a thicket, the face of one patient in a crowd. In this poem, looking at one gnarl first, we can see the chart of one individual patient, and when we step back, we can see the whole. Her tendency to seek beauty in what would ordinarily be considered ugliness and her sense that safety can only be found in stability reflect her past experiences; living among patients disfigured by disease, she can recognize a scar as a sign of victory over suffering. And stability as a goal achieved by grouping is a basic tenet of the Communist Party, which led the Hansen's disease patients in their battle for justice, and also in Christianity, where the object of the church as a body is mutual support as an expression of God's will. Kazuko, being less of a political activist and more a devout Christian, as an individual may have been more influenced by the latter; but Hansen's disease patients as a group moved under the guidance of outsiders representing the Communist Party. In any case, living in such crowded quarters as Hansen's disease patients did, clearly mutual help would be an everyday comfort.

Another approach she uses is one in which we are never sure whether she is the object and the object is she, or if she really is just an observer. An absolutely delicious example can be seen in "The White Peach," published in 1986 in The Poetry Collection of Love when she was about 57.

The White Peach ¹⁶

The ripe white peach's
 Delicate scent
 Creamy color
 Easily injured beauty
 Like the dawn
 Its freshness
 I quietly place facing you
 It seems to say, "Eat me any time you like"
 This
 Lack of guard
 Towards you
 My heart has ripened so much
 Quietly
 The mortification of the time remaining only to rot
 Even so
 Myself, at a complete loss
 I still gaze upon
 I am
 Now
 Unable to move

Who is to say whether she is really just offering her husband a peach, or if she is trying to seduce him? We know that she always asked him to read her poems first, and only preserved the ones he praised. So she wrote it for his pleasure. Maybe she was in a playful mood that day.

Yet another style, which we see more in her recent works, is the direct expression of how nature affects her and her moods. The poem "Listening," from her 19th collection, is completely honest with us.

Listening ¹⁷

The sound of the wind
The song of a little bird
The quiet, quiet sounds of life
As I am still and silent, pricking my ears
It is as if my body and soul are cleansed
In the morning garden
Nobody to hinder me
Listening to the music created by nature
Softly, I become lighter
Peacefully
My heart floating
Enjoying how it rises again and again
At times, the song of the little bird
I try to imitate
It has no great significance
Just a 70-year-old's autumn

With age, her poems show a tendency to use fewer deliberate poetic devices and to more directly express her ideas. On the one hand, this sounds like a step away from poetry toward prose, but in the case of a poem such as "Listening," while the entirety is pure fact, the image surpasses actuality, leading into the realm of surrealism. The bird is, in fact, just a little bird singing a little song, but through her attempts at imitation, we see her desire to become the bird, to take on the role of musician instead of remaining a passive spectator. Agelessness is always striking in her works; at 57, in "The White Peach," she is a seductress; in "Listening," at 74, she wants to become part of the cosmos. Like the Taoists, as she ages, she gradually fades into nature naturally. In "Listening," we see reflections of the age of Princess Nukada, when it was still permissible to include one's personal reactions to the beauty of nature in a poem. Princess Nukada picks the yellow leaves, leaving the green ones with a sigh; Kazuko listens to the music of nature, her heart floating.

The following collection of translated poems should give the reader an idea of the direction of To Kazuko's growth. She begins with a youthful intensity, progresses to a more balanced vision, and as she ages further, moves toward a more mellowed

peacefulness. While the dates are not actually part of the title, I have put them in so that the reader can get an idea of her development over time. She was born in 1929, put into the leprosarium in 1944, and married in 1951. Her beloved husband died in the fall of 2000.

V. Some Selected Poems of Kazuko To

Casting off Skin 1961¹⁸

Like a naked tree
Refreshingly
I want to stretch out my plainest form on the earth

An insect that fell in the spider's web
Its violent resistance
Dug it deeper into the viscous strands of the web
That gloomy struggling
The fate of shamelessly gazing at it of
The web of the poisonous spider's
Ominous flexibility I want to kick away
That limpid springing figure
Like a naked tree, on the earth
I want to cast out

Things That Awaken 1969¹⁹

Inside the mouth of Eve
The sweetness of the fruit vanished
To be boiled down in the course of history
One drop of bitter juice

If she had not known, there would have been no sweetness
If she had not known, there would have been no scent

If she had not held it, neither could she have lost it

In the cradle rocked by God

Primitive men were pecking at the idleness of time

I know the flavor you knew

I know the scent you knew

I sorrow for the sadness of being unable to return to the time when we didn't know
what we know

Even if my body is

Inside the soft shadow of a curtain

On a slightly warm afternoon in a flower garden

Able to call back the idleness of the primitive ages

My soul is still

Wandering about, sore with loneliness

A sinful person

The beginning of humankind

The destiny of humankind

The beginning of knowledge

The original form of the careless lovable woman

Eve

Was it a sin to gain knowledge ?

Inside of me

Something always whispers

And I

Expecting something more wonderful

Enter into the depths of knowledge

To know

To know

To know

Is that a sin ?

Is that glory ?

Like the green of the forest

A mysterious stillness

Calls me to its plentiful expanse

I am

Lonely so

I go there

Because I go there

I am lonely

Puddles 1969 ²⁰

When I awoke

A puddle had been made

Over that puddle

Not even looking back

A person crossed lightly

I am

Clumsy and it is impossible for me to cross

My feet always get stuck in puddles

Mud

Trying to drag me in

Made a weird sound

Even so

A blind person

Not even noticing that there was a puddle

Was walking with complete indifference

Each in his own thoughts

Reflecting the depth of our minds

Was a strange and

Mysterious puddle

Descendants of Eve 1973 ²¹

The eye of the spring
The lips of the strawberry
The cheeks of the apricot
The soft hair of May grass blowing in the wind
The legs of the doe
The thin fingers of the tiger lily pistils
Woman, wrapped in the fresh smell of wildness
Brought with her
One snake
One angel
Women are
Always pure and lovely and
Full of pride but
Being unable to escape from the dark suggestions of the snake
They have continued to wander between desire, suspicion and repentance
Women entertaining both night and day
Their bodies, flushing with instinct and intellect
Shine with an incomprehensible charm
A flower garden blooming in a profusion of contradictions
Woman
That gentle thing
Strong thing
That thing whose charm is due to its sinfulness
I
Am allowing this one beautiful woman to live in me
I am a residence

Dominion 1976 ²²

At the moment of birth
Not realizing that she had given birth to death

The empty body of the mother
Looks, satisfied, at the division
But death
Receives the hand earlier than life
Some day the child must pay
The promissory note of death that life is
Mother
My warm birthplace
In the nebulosity
The substance that is me
The substance divided into the death that lies beyond the lives standing close together
The fact of being alive
Warm breath and soft body and
The warmth of emotion that comes from hands holding; looking at these
I could not see through the solidarity of the object
That gentle thing
But the hand held out
Flesh and bones and a little blood
If I cut them off
The object would drop off as a whole with the same weight as a rubber hand
Life, not elected a councilor of death, is nowhere
In the sharp autumn sunshine
The hand of death that received me and
The earth that strongly supports my tread and
That moment that is solemnly revived in its magnificence
Exchanged on the labor bed
The signing and sealing of life and death
Vividly occupies
The dominion that is me

Vomit 1978²³

In the kitchen

It's said that they laughed at the fish jumping after its entrails had been
taken out

At the table

It's said they laughed at the still-moving flesh

In the Nazi concentration camp

People cutting off legs

Were said to have laughed at the people whose legs they cut

Sticking bamboo into the severed legs and making them walk

If they fell, they laughed

At one leprosarium

They put in false eyes

Put on wigs

Put on artificial legs

At last returning them to a human shape

It's said they laughed at the sorrow of the missing parts

It's said the people laughed again

In laughing

Feeling no pain

Not wanting to vomit

Making a fire

Just

Laughed naturally, it's said

The Radiance of Life 1980 ²⁴

The peach putting on its buds is shining

In the hospital room

The white uniform of the young nurse shines

Oh

Around the things that stand with hidden vigor is

Faintly bright

It looks as if the old are receding far back

Today, now

Humans and flowers competing their youth
Bursting with the breath of life
But
Restlessly time
Falls upon everything
Buds become blossoms
Blossoms are tempted to open wide
Space supports the petals
Also receiving the instant they fall and scatter, dancing
A young hand also clings to bony empty space
This
Season full of freshness; behind
The grim reaper is spreading out his hands and indulging in sake and revelry
Receiving the grace of time
Everything departs but
By the transitions of time
What expands and becomes replete is
Only the world of death
But
Now I'll just
Absorbedly watch the radiance of life
I shall gaze fondly

One Queen 1980 ²⁵

The dandelion
Sticking thin petals into the open sky, is blooming
The violet
Is flowing in a somewhat sideways, graceful shape
The wayside flowers
Are occupying their positions like laughing children
The wildflowers
Remain tangled together on the banks of the fields

Each spreading roots on each other's roots
Proudly blossoming with each respective blossom
In spite of that
Women, indulging in their self-conceit
As they have not enough confidence to definitely state that they are more beautiful than
anyone else
"Mirror, mirror on the wall
Who is the fairest of them all"
Wet with grief that cannot be satisfied without asking this
Stand their heavy bodies in open space
Make plumply dark shadows accompany them
The open space receives both the wildflowers and the people but
The space occupied by the wildflowers shines, full of calm
But women
With their insatiable, tenacious attachment to beauty
Trying to fulfill a sense of superiority
Can command "Kill Snow White"
One ill-tempered queen
Allowed to live inside their selves
Always walking with them

Matches 1980 ²⁶

Inside a small box
A brown ball slightly stuck on the tip
Sticks are lined up
A person takes one in hand
If he does not strike
It forever retains a cold expression

Strike the match
There, a flame starting, it burns
This moment

How much it must have waited

Twisting its body

To the end of the stick

There is a flame crawling up

This moment is

The match

The wish of a small thing to burn

Nobody thinks deeply about when watching it

All burnt out

A long thin

Ash it becomes

In the ashtray

What is no longer a match

Has become all crumpled up

But

Indifferent to those things

People

Are smoking cigarettes as if they are delicious

A Thing that Crawls on the Earth 1980 ²⁷

Charmingly dressed

Not a peacock, though

Runs with great vivacity

Not a serow either

It looks as if I

Must be a slimy lukewarm reptile

Damp grudges and sadness

And a body accustomed to inertia

Moving my disgusting body silently

The area all around

I envelop in a dubious atmosphere

That's me

So

Even I think I want to destroy myself

I put an overdose of medicine in front of me and thought but

Without even me noticing

From that thought

I had smoothly slipped out

Even after that

How many years now

Have I been living

Stroking back my dried scales

The cooled earth

I am still crawling

The Whisper of Death 1980²⁸

Looking at flowers

Trembling at their brilliance

Looking at water gushing out

Trembling at its clear purity

Standing in the wind that rubs my cheek

Trembling at the refreshing quality of the wind

When someone speaks ill of me

Becoming angry as a demon

When someone praises me

I am troubled, not knowing which way to direct my delicately bashful gaze

This raw living thing

Cannot be living in silence

Relating to all things

Like fire

I like to live burning

With emotions breathing in my body I am,

Like a cock always fighting,

All puffed up
To this me
Though I think even death cannot encroach
Joy's and
Fire's rages, in the intervals between
"The bones that are standing you up
Will be the only things to remain in my hand"
A faint, faint
Whisper of the God of Death can be heard

The Naked Me 1980 ²⁹

Laughing like a fool
Gesturing like a jester
Also paying compliments
Also telling jokes
One day I thought was pleasant
I contemplate in reticence

That was not I
That was a doll I made to act
On the stage that was today
I
Working my puppet to the best of my ability
Showed an excellent act
Those who came across my act
Applauded without a shadow of doubt

What I'd thought was pleasant
Was probably due to that
At night
In my sharp awakesness
What I did

Peels off one layer after another
The naked me is very cold

Desire 1988³⁰

To my flavorless life
But one
Thing adds flavor
That is desire
When my body swells with desire
I am so alive
If it is a desire pumped up from a deep well
Any desire is fine
 The desire to eat
 The desire for wealth
 Sexual desire
 The desire for knowledge
 The desire to create
 The desire for fame
Oh, desire
I love you so
Where you are not
There is no fruit, no flavor, no me
Using my brain marrow when it has become full of you
From the depths of my existence
If I were to draw forth shining words
There could be no greater satisfaction
Oh, my desire
 You color me
 No matter how dark a place I am in
 But one
 Burning flame is you
My head overflowing with the vigor of desire

Keeping inside my body a heart made splendid by desire
Ahead of that
If there is but one cup
Of hope I can fix on and be walking toward
I
Can continue walking forever

The Swamp 1989 ³¹

There
They were really trifling things
In the kitchen, in the bamboo basket were
The tips of sweet Satsuma potatoes and
The nail my father's field clothes were hung on and
The basket my mother took to pick garden peas and
Around the fire in the hearth
The ghost stories the old men of the neighborhood told
But now they shine
The meals punctually carried in
The life at the leprosarium that I can find no meaning in
These lonely days that seem to reduce my blood
The trivial fact that I must go on living
The uncertain hope that might come tomorrow
Slightly brightening the everyday
When I feel I shall drown in the heavy time
Those from the old days
Out of my basket of beautiful memories
Twinkling as they float to the surface
Put me to sleep amid a pleasant aroma
And I
As I realize it
Am on a very very thin lotus leaf
And all around me might be a swamp

Afternoon in the Leprosarium 1989 ³²

Like a silkworm
We eat what we are given
We do nothing
Here where doing nothing is normal
If we are alive
If we are dead it becomes difficult to perceive
Afternoon in this leprosarium

The nurse who is assisting at meals
To sell feather bedding
The salesman is becoming frantic
Only around them
Like May sunshine
Shining freshly
 The meaning of life
 Advancing
 Deeply coldly
 Is being questioned
 Is being questioned

And I
Ahead of that
Am standing thinly like the tail of a dragonfly

The Rose Tree 1998 ³³

In one place
A glossy and beautiful line
Thorns stuck to a smooth stem
One rose tree that now has cream-colored blossoms

The purity of the just-bloomed
A few proud green leaves
The stems armed with their sturdy thorns
And
The pride in being a rose
The loneliness of being a rose
The happiness of being a rose
And the sadness of being a rose included, the rose exists
Don't anyone come near
Tormented by this inner contradiction
Protected by its thorns
The abundantly aromatic rose

A Daffodil 1998 ³⁴

The daffodil bloomed, swaying
When cut, from the stem to the flower
Water that had been running through in a straight line
At the cut, powerfully
Drips
Water becomes a flower or
Becomes a vegetable or
Becomes a fruit
Having so many disguises
Appears
But these mysterious metamorphoses of water
A delicate art
Thinking about its mystique
Are there people watching it ?
The cut daffodil
As I move it to the vase of water
The daffodil
The water that forms it

Sucks up almost noisily
Like a wave, its pure aroma
It slowly spreads
Making me, its arranger, wince

Happiness 2000³⁵

Because I am dirty, I long for beautiful things
Because dried up, I long for kindness
As long as I am dirty
I can continue to look at beautiful things
As long as I am dried up
I can continue to feel mushy kindness
So I don't want to become beautiful
I don't want to become mushy kindness
It's enough to be near them
Narrowing my eyes
My mouth watering
I am watching them
Right next to them
I cannot reach them
That distance in itself
Is a voluminous radiance
Beauty, kindness, they are
My lovers
Because of the fact that I long for them so much
I am happier than anyone

Travel 2002³⁶

Met by the light of this world
A long trip began
Two steps, three steps from my mother's knee

My legs witnessed the voyage of life
In my childhood, to the next town
After I got a little bigger it was
For medical examinations of Hansen's disease
Led by my father
To Fukuoka Tokyo Osaka
Each university hospital, and then
Passing through countless small hospitals
Repeating the medical examination trips
Finally settling at the island leprosarium but
That was a place of no return
Looking back, fifty years there
Silently piling up the days, I arrived at today
And
Now the enclosing wall of the Leprosy Prevention Law
Has been taken away
Clinging to this joy of becoming a legally free self
Where shall I travel to
Here, there, to the end of the earth
My wishes grow but my body has become unable to follow them
But still
The illusions of happy trips unable to be carried out
I hope to make come true
I am hoping so much

Birth 2003³⁷

Like giving birth to a beloved child
I strenuously bear words
If at times I drop them smoothly
Even if I suffer labor pains
They are not born easily –
Such times of difficult labor also exist

In the worst cases, there are times when although they are born, they are dead at birth
 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
 I am sad or joyful
 Today again bearing my lovely children
 As yet they have received judgment from no one but
 So that they may be deemed healthy children
 I am enjoying working to improve them

VI. Conclusion

I would like to conclude this paper with my sincere hope that To Kazuko's beautiful and sensitive poetry becomes known to the Western world, and along with it, that we can all learn a lesson from history and make whatever little efforts we can to prevent any similar inhumane incarceration anywhere in the world.

Footnotes

- 1 『ハンセン病をどう教えるか』、開放出版社、『ハンセン病をどう教えるか』編集委員会、2003年、p.6.
- 2 Kai Lung's Golden Hours, by Ernest Bramah, copyright 1972 by Ballantine Books, p.14
- 3 『ハンセン病をどう教えるか』 p. 20.
- 4 Statement by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi Concerning the Swift and Comprehensive Solution of the Hansen's Disease Issue, May 25, 2001, Provisional Translation, p.1.
- 5 いちま人形、株式会社花神社、塔和子著、1980、p. 64.
- 6 「背い鳥探して第4部 絶望から希望へ～(15) 隔離の島の詩人(下)生の意味を問い続け」、四国新聞掲載、2004年2月20日。

- 7 「一地の塩・世の光－卒業生の働き2」、2004年11月9日、<http://www.shizuoka-eiwa.ed.jp/611-2dosou.htm>.
- 8 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、株式会社皓星者、2004年、p.16、originally published in はだか木 in 1961.
- 9 楽々理解ハンセン病、花伝社、2001年、武村淳著、p. 31.
- 10 生き抜いた！－ハンセン病元患者の肖像と軌跡、高波淳著、株式会社草風間、2003年、p. 180.
- 11 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 314, originally published in いのちの宴 in 1983.
- 12 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 316, originally published in いのちの宴 in 1983.
- 13 Anthology of Chinese Literature, edited by Cyril Birch, published in 1965 by Grove Press, Inc. p. 238. "Looking Out Over the Plains" was translated by A.C. Graham.
- 14 The Ten Thousand Leaves, translated by Ian Hideo Levy, published by Princeton University Press in 1981, p. 46.
- 15 いのちの詩－塔和子詩選集、株式会社編集工房ノア、1999年、p. 14. Originally published in はだか木 in 1961.
- 16 いのちの詩－塔和子詩選集、p. 96. Originally published in 愛の詩集 in 1986.
- 17 今日という木を、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2003年、p. 30.
- 18 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 18, originally published in はだか木 in 1961.
- 19 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 78, originally published in 分身 in 1969.
- 20 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 84, originally published in 分身 in 1969.
- 21 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 130, originally published in エバの裔 in 1973.
- 22 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 179, originally published in 第一日の孤独 in 1976.
- 23 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 188, originally published in 聖なるものは木 in 1978.
- 24 いちま人形、p. 76.
- 25 いちま人形、p. 72.
- 26 いちま人形、p. 50.
- 27 いちま人形、p. 32.
- 28 いちま人形、p. 38.
- 29 いちま人形、p. 15.
- 30 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 387, originally published in 未知なる知者よ in 1988.
- 31 不明の花、塔和子著、図書出版海風社、1989年、p. 12.
- 32 不明の花、p. 70.
- 33 記憶の川で、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、1998年、p. 26.
- 34 記憶の川で、p. 36.

- 35 ハンセン病文学全集第7巻 詩二、p. 525、originally published in 私の明日が in 2000.
- 36 希望の火を、塔和子著、株式会社編集工房ノア、2002年、p. 20.
- 37 今日という木を、p. 52.

All To Kazuko poems were translated by Jill Emma Strothman.

【キーワード】 塔 和子
ハンセン病
詩