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My Daughter's Room, Stone Monument and Girl 2 by Ishikawa Itsuko

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Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
My Daughter's Room

Ishikawa Itsuko
娘の部屋

The day before I visited the Chidorigafuchi
My daughter
You went and left home

Your room completely empty
Your old clothes left behind in that chest of drawers
The blue curtains sway
You are not here

You simply removed yourself from this house
Under the same Tokyo sky
You'll be opening your window today too, as full of energy as always
Your departure fills me with such pain

Your footsteps no longer clatter down the stairs
Your easy laughter no longer echoes around
Such emptiness
Fills my eyes with tears

Without you
In your room I stand lost
That makes me wonder
How those mothers must have felt
The day that red draft slip arrived

How those mothers must have felt
Sending their sons off with a banzai
Sons, who will end as bones

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Stone Monument

Ishikawa Itsuko
石の碑

There stood the large stone monument

Is this what is engraved here?

*Due to unjust national policy
They became pitiful bones they lie here
We must never again allow our nation to go to war*

It was just a poem by His Majesty Emperor Showa

*Whenever we ponder on those who dedicated their lives for the
cause of our nation,
Our heart aches with deep emotion*

These numberless lives
Sacrificed for none other than you

*I become a shield for Your Majesty My Emperor
Although my blood splatters the clouds I have no regrets*

By Ushikubo Hiroichi Tokyo Medical University

*My friends depart for war
I too depart
Your Majesty My Emperor we will be your shields
We will not come back alive*

By Ono Masaaki Deceased aged nineteen

*At your word Your Majesty My Emperor
I will go, go to the very edge of world, even to my death*

By Oomori Shigenori Died somewhere near the Truk Islands

Sacrificing themselves to you Your Majesty
Missing their mothers with heart wrenching sorrow
I think about those lives that can never live again
Your Majesty, have you thought about

The tears that overflowed the hearts of these young men
each night before each death

*Smiling for me my mother places her hand on my uniformed
shoulder*

I return to base saying nothing

You, who flew out from Chiran, Washio Katsumi

*Looking at the many many letters sent to me by my mother
I thinking lovingly of her eyes when we parted last year*

You, Mizui Toshio, who became a human torpedo five days before the
surrender

For those men who can never again return home

At the very least instead of writing that fragment of poetry

You, Your Majesty, should have become a monk and prayed for the peace of
their souls

You should have lived in isolation I wish you had

Carol Hayes and Rina Kikuchi
Girl 2

Ishikawa Itsuko
少女 2

15th August 1945
The day your motherland was liberated
You were so sick
No longer able to sit up

After abusing you so relentlessly
The Japanese soldiers
Ran off in their army trucks in mad haste
Yet you knew nothing of all this
Left with your six 'elder sisters'
Lying there in that tiny freezing hut You
You, only seventeen years old
With no understanding of the hidden meaning of "Voluntary Labour Corps"
You, left your home town

Under guard on the train
Later jolted roughly in the last truck of the convoy
Taken to that cold place teeth chilled to the very root
Your untouched body still to ripen
Falls prey to a sabred officer

Each day twenty thirty men
Am I alive? Am I dead?
Shaking with cold so I must be still living
Even when I'm menstruating, soldiers arrive one after another
Am I no longer in the human world?
Beaten for any refusal
Swollen cheeks burning with pain so I must be still living

One day spots appeared
All over your body
Your lower body so inflamed so painful
You infected with venereal disease
“When it gets really bad we’re sent off in a truck
and dumped out on the empty plains”
You terrified by such whispered talk

Even then the soldiers continue to arrive
Your infection worse day by day
Your body burningly feverish
“Will it be me? Will I fall prey to wolves?”
But on that one day the Japanese army discarded you
Let’s run away quickly
The others call to you
I can’t move, I’ll stay here with my sisters
Annyeonghi kashipshiyo (Farewell)
You let fall a single tear like a morning dewdrop

What happened after that nobody knows
Did you survive?
Did you die?
If alive where are you?
If dead where are you?

Seventeen years old
“I thought I’d be nursing wounded soldiers.”
That’s what they say you said one day with such a face of girlish
innocence
So like a pink peach blossom

15th August 1945

“Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity...”

Hearing His Majesty Emperor Showa’s radio announcement

No more blackout regulations No more air raids

Contradicting the beliefs of a patriotic daughter of the emperor

That twelve-year old me was so relieved

But in that abandoned “comfort women” station in Jilin

The six of you lying there unable to move and you so emaciated

What happened to you?

Only the wind bears witness

Commentary

Ishikawa Itsuko was born in Tokyo in 1933. She graduated from Ochanomizu University's history department and her work continues to reflect her deep interest in history. Much of her poetry has focused on war victims, particularly the victimisation of women in war and the violence perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Army across Asia and the Pacific. Ishikawa is the author of many books, including works for younger readers about the war, such as her 1993 work, *Jūgun ianfu ni sareta shōjotachi* (「従軍慰安婦」にされた少女たち: *The Girls Forced to Be Military Comfort Women*). Her first collection of poetry, *Hi ni Sando no Chikai* (日に三度の誓い: *Three Prayers a Day*) was published in 1956 when she was only 23 years old and since then her work has been celebrated by many awards.

“My Daughter’s Room” and “The Stone Monument” were first published in her 1985 *Chidorigafuchi e ikimashita ka* (千鳥ヶ淵へ行きましたか: *Have You Been to Chidorigafuchi?*) collection and “Girl 2” was published in her 1994 collection, *Kudakareta hanatachi e no rekuitemu* (砕かれた花たちへのレクイエム: *Requiem to Trampled Flowers*).

In “My Daughter’s Room,” Ishikawa focuses on the “loss” of a child, drawing a thematic link between the mother in poem who feels a terrible sense of emptiness when her daughter moves out and mothers forced to farewell their sons to war. Ishikawa skilfully encourages her contemporary readers to imagine how those war time mothers must have felt by beginning the poem with a contemporary mother whose daughter had left home the day before she visited Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery for War Dead. Finding herself standing in her daughter’s now empty room, this mother imagines the pain felt by those war-time mothers when that fateful red slip arrived. The war draft notice was written on red paper and therefore known as *akagami* (赤紙) literally “red paper.” Ishikawa creates a further link between Tokyo now and then, by writing “Tokyo” in Katakana script (トウキョウ) rather than Chinese characters. This suggests that the Tokyo in the poem straddles a number of different time lines, including the contemporary Tokyo of today and the Tokyo during WWII.

On a more linguistic note, we have used the verb “will” in the final line of our translation of “My Daughter’s Room,” “Sons, who will end as bones” (骨になってしまうかもしれない) to express the verb *kamoshirenai*, more commonly translated as “may.” Although this expression can be used to convey uncertainty, in this case, there is a more superstitious implication. There is a strong Japanese belief in the power of words, referred to as *kotodama* (spirit of words). If words are spoken aloud, the power implicit in the word will cause what has been said to happen. No mother would dare to say her fears aloud in case that meant she had in fact helped cause her son’s death. So although she is all but certain that her son will never return home alive she uses the expression *kamoshirenai* to dilute the potential power of the *kotodama*.

Both “The Stone Monument” and “Girl 2” are powerful poems dealing with a difficult period in Japan’s modern history, focusing readers on various points of contestation. They present an uncompromising indictment of Emperor Showa, who Ishikawa feels should have taken far more responsibility for his acceptance of the sacrifices of so many young soldiers and an unsettling picture of the comfort women forced into sexual slavery by the Japanese Imperial Army in the occupied territories. Ishikawa ironically uses the term “Voluntary Labour Corps” or *Kinrō teishin-tai* (勤労挺身隊). Although this term translates literally as “voluntary,” during WWII the term was used as a euphemism for military comfort women.

Ishikawa presents herself both as a young girl during the war and as an older wiser poet, now looking back at the terrible acts perpetrated by the Japanese Imperial Army, embarrassed by her on complicit acceptance of the wartime patriotism. She uses the expression *Kōkoku shōjo* (皇国少女) or “patriotic daughter of the emperor” to emphasise how she and other young girls at the time, were encouraged to cheer on their army as the model of a “true” daughter of the Japanese empire.

Ishikawa embeds a series of tanka poems into “The Stone Monument,” beginning with a poem by herself in which she imagines what she thinks should have been engraved on the monument at Chidorigafuchi National Cemetery for War Dead. She then introduces the poem by Emperor Showa which is

actually engraved there. This contrast allows her to focus on the political underpinning of the poem, her challenge to Emperor Showa to accept his responsibility for the war. The poem then continues with a series of tanka composed by young Japanese soldiers written on the battlefield. By embedding these poems, she allows these soldiers to speak directly to her readers, showing just how deeply they believed in their emperor and how willingly they gave their lives as his shield. A contemporary reader cannot avoid feeling both a great sense of sadness and horror at their seemingly selfless sacrifice.

Our translation of “The Stone Monument” uses the official translation of Emperor Showa’s poem, as displayed on the Ministry of Environment’s official Chidorigafuchi website¹ however, the translation of the soldiers’ poems are our own. We have used italics to emphasise the fact that these are quotations within the poem.

The two final poems were both written by young men who were soon to undertake suicide missions. The second last poem by Washio Katsumi was written at the Chiran base used by the kamikaze pilots. Some kamikaze pilots were allowed a short trip home to say farewell to their families before they flew off to their death. Others were allowed to spend a night with a family living near the Chiran base to symbolically farewell their families. The inclusion of Chiran in Ishikawa’s poem shows not only that Washio Katsumi was a kamikaze pilot but implies that he will soon fly to his death. The tragedy of this poem lies in the fact that the young pilot must “say nothing”; he cannot tell his mother, as she smiles in farewell, that this will be the last time he will ever see her. Although he uses the verb *kaeru*, often used to refer to returning home, the young pilot is referring to returning back to the Chiran base, thus implying his impending kamikaze flight. The final poem by Mizuo Toshio also focuses on the suicide missions of the Imperial army but this time providing an image of the human torpedos used by the navy, all the more poignant because his poem was written only five days before the surrender.

¹ (<http://www.env.go.jp/garden/chidorigafuchi/english/>)

Ishikara skillfully avoids clarifying the subject in much of her poetry, often avoiding the use of pronouns altogether. This strategy allows Ishikawa to draw her readers into her work and to include them as the “you” or “we” of particular poems. “Girl 2” provides one such example in which Ishikawa sometimes includes pronouns and sometimes deliberately avoids them. The reader must consider whether the focus is actually the ailing 17-year-old “comfort woman,” the poet, or even the reader herself/himself. In our English translation, however, due to the importance of personal pronouns in English grammar, we have chosen to include the subject pronoun, even when omitted in the original. In another example, in our translation of “The Stone Monument,” we have sometimes chosen to include the title “Your Majesty” when the poet is using only the pronoun “you” (あなた) when we felt that it was important to clarify that she was referring to the emperor.

Another feature of Ishikawa’s Japanese original is her use of spaces rather than commas to incorporate pauses into her poetic phrasing. We have chosen to represent these inter-line pauses by adding longer spaces in the English, as a single space would fail to have the same effect.

Translators’ Notes: “My Daughter’s Room”

Red draft slip: The draft notice that families received when their sons were drafted to war was written on red paper and so was referred to as *akagami* (赤紙), literally “red paper.”

Banzai: During the war years, this expression was commonly used to bid farewell to soldiers as they left to fight for the emperor. It was very common to see a large group, made up of family, neighbours and the general public, gathering at the railway stations to cheer the soldiers on their way.

Translators’ Notes: “Stone Monument”

Chiran: During the war, Chiran, located in Kagoshima Prefecture, served as an airbase for kamikaze pilots.

Human torpedo: In the original Japanese, the term used is *kaiten* (回天), which refers to the miniature submarine suicide torpedoes, manned by one sailor, that were used at the very end of WWII by the Japanese navy.

Translators' Notes: "Girl 2"

Voluntary Labour Corps: The Japanese term *Kinrō teishin-tai* (勤勞挺身隊) directly translates as "Voluntary Labour Corps"; however, during WWII this term was used to refer women and girls who were drafted for sexual and industrial labour. It came to be used as a euphemism for military comfort women.

Annyeonghi kashipshiyo: In the original poem, this Korean expression is written in Hangeul with Japanese katakana furigana, as follows, 안녕히 가십시오. This is then followed by the Japanese translation *Sayonara* (さようなら) presented in brackets. In Korean this phrase is expressed in formal respectful language, which more literally means "Please look after yourselves and just go, leave me behind."

"Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity...": This is an extract from Emperor Showa's surrender speech which was broadcast at noon on August 15, 1945. We have used the translation quoted in Robert J.C. Butow's *Japan's Decision to Surrender*, published in 1954 by Stanford University Press.

Patriotic daughter of the emperor: In the Japanese original, the term used is *Kōkoku shōjo* (皇国少女). This term was used to refer to the "patriotic young girl" that every "true" daughter of the Japanese empire should model herself on.

"Comfort women" station: In the Japanese original, the term used is *Ianjo* (慰安所). This refers to the military brothels which were set up to service the Japanese soldiers during WWII.