



## **Tada Chimako's Haiku**

**by Hiroaki Sato**

In the last year of her life, the poet Tada Chimako (多田智満子, 1930-2003) wrote haiku under the guidance of another poet, Takahashi Mutsuo (高橋睦郎, born 1937). This came about not just because the two poets admired each other and worked on a literary magazine. It also came about because Takahashi is one outstanding exception in Japan. There the reverence to specialization holds in poetry-writing as well, so that those who write tanka are called *kajin* (歌人), those who write haiku *haijin* (俳人), and those who write “poems” (詩) that belong to neither genre *shijin* (詩人), and each of the *kajin*, *haijin*, and *shijin* do not usually pursue the others’ genres. In this milieu Takahashi, who started out as a *shijin*, went on to cover the genres of tanka and haiku, and won major prizes in all three branches.

Tada herself did not limit herself to “poems”: she wrote tanka and collected them in her seventh book of poetry, *Suien* (Water Spray), published in 1975. But it was only after she was found to have cancer, in November 2001, that she decided to try her hand in haiku. We do not know why she did so, but the haiku she composed over a period of about a year while she was heading toward death turned out to be what Takahashi calls a “sickbed diary.” They are not beginner’s pieces, either. After all, Tada was a poet admired for her deft references to a wide range of literary traditions who was at the same time an accomplished translator of such works as Marguerite Yourcenar’s *Mémoires d’Hadrien*. She had a fine sense of style backed up with erudition and a solid grasp of what was possible in the sharply confining genre of haiku.

As might be expected from the fact that she had the traditionalist haiku writer Takahashi as mentor and guide, Tada wrote haiku comforting to the basic rules of the 5-7-5-syllable pattern and the inclusion of *kigo*, seasonal indicators.

A selection of about 160 of Tada’s haiku, edited and arranged by Takahashi, was published in two formats after her death: one as part of a memorial booklet and the other as an independent haiku book, titled *Kaze no katami* (風のかたみ A Wind’s Mementos).

Jeffrey Angles translates 23 haiku in his book, *Forest of Eyes: Selected Poems of Tada Chimako* (University of California Press, 2010).

*Cancer* that is Crab and also Cancer <sup>1</sup>

獅子座流星雨果てて蟹座の病棟へ

*Shishi-za ryūseiu hatete Kani-za no byōtō e*

Constellation Leo meteor shower ends and I to Constellation Crab Ward

身のうちに死はやはらかき冬の疣

*Mi no uchi ni shi wa yawarakaki fuyu no ibo*

Inside my body death is a soft wintry wart

冬の日の熟れて梢にふるへおり

*Fuyu no hi no urete kozue ni furueori*

The winter sun having ripened trembles at the treetop

---

<sup>1</sup> Heading to the first haiku. It refers to the fact that *cancer* as the name of a constellation and as a sign in the Zodiac is the Latin for “crab,” and is also the disease so named. The haiku that follows is hypersyllabic, with “Shishi-za,” Constellation Leo, adding three syllables.

つはぶきの蔭や小猫のされかうべ

*Tsuwabuki<sup>2</sup> no kage ya koneko no sarekōbe*

In the shadow of a crested leopard lies a kitten's skull

繻帯をほどけば春のミイラかな

*Hōtai o hodokeba haru no miira kana*

The bandages undone I am the very mummy of spring

春愁や薬水てふ驛ありて

*Shunshū ya Kusurimizu<sup>3</sup> chō eki arite*

Vernal melancholy: here's a station named Medicine Water

眼差の當るやはたと椿落つ

*Manazashi no ataru ya hata to tsubaki otsu*

My eyes hit it and the camellia falls with a thump

---

<sup>2</sup> *Farfugium japonicum*: a plant with bright yellow daisy-like flowers that bloom over roundish, fleshy leaves. <http://www.hana300.com/tuwabu.html>

<sup>3</sup> A train station in Nara. So named because it is near a well-spring named after Kusurimizu Daishi, one of the names of the Buddhist proselytizer Kūkai, Kōbō Daishi (774-835) <http://kagiroy.narasaku.jp/e21203.html>

波は波をくるんで轉ぶ春の沙

*Nami wa nami o kurunde marobu haru no suna*

The waves roll up the waves and tumble over the spring sand

来む春は墓遊びせむ花の蔭

*Komu haru ha haka asobisemu hana no kage*

Come spring I'll play with my grave under cherry flowers

水すまし水を踏む水へこませて

*Mizusumashi mizu o fumu mizu hekomasete*

A water strider treads the water denting the water

むかし父ありき麻服パナマ帽

*Mukashi chichi ariki asafuku Panama-bō*

There once was Father in a hemp suit and a Panama hat

むかし母すだれ巻き上ぐる腕白し

*Mukashi hana sudare makiaguru ude shiroshi*

Once upon a time Mother rolled up blinds her arms white

忘れ盡くして軽き頭や籠枕

*Wasuretsukushite karoki kashira ya kagomakura<sup>4</sup>*

Having forgotten all my head is light on a basket pillow

いなびかりしぶき蹴立てて雨走る

*Inabikari shibuki ketatete ame hashiru*

Lightning: kicking up splashes the rain runs

谷暮るるたぎち白きは白きまま

*Tani kururu tagichi shiroki wa shiroki mama*

The valley darkening the water boiling up white remains white

流れ星我より我の脱け落つる

*Nagareboshi ware yori ware no nukeotsuru*

A shooting star: from my self my self drops away

---

<sup>4</sup> A pillow made of wicker or bamboo.

海怖ろし波がつぎつぎ手を擧げて

*Umi osoroshi nami ga tsugitsugi te o agete*

The sea frightens, the waves raising their hands one after another

葉を脱いで櫛すらりと月の中

*Ha o nuide keyaki surarito tsuki no naka*

Having shed its leaves the zelkova stands svelte in the moonlight

がらんどうの夜汽車明るく盲ひたる

*Garandō no yogisha akaruku meshiitaru*

A totally vacant night train bright, is blind

秋深き隣にたれか爪を切る

*Aki fukaki tonari ni tare ka tsume o kiru*

Autumn deep someone next-door clips his nails

玉葱や七皮剥けば何もなし

*Tamanegi ya naka-kawa mukeba nani mo nashi*

An onion: peel away seven layers and nothing is left

皺の手が皺のシーツをのばす冬

*Shiwa no te ga shiwa no shiitsu o nobasu fuyu*

This winter my wrinkled hand smoothes out a wrinkled sheet

病みほけて鳩を蔑する鴉かな

*Yamihokete hato o namisuru karasu kana*

Totally sick and silly a crow looks down upon a dove

病鴉遂に病巢の中に巣ごもらむ

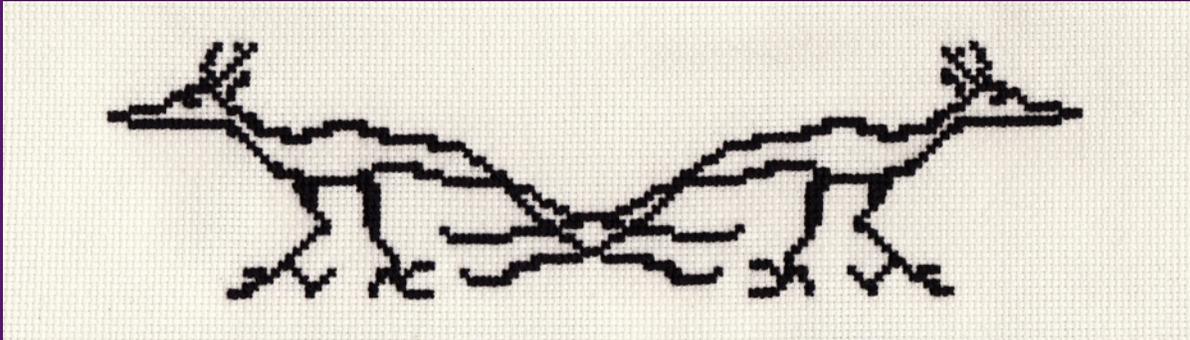
*Byōa tsui ni byōsu no naka ni sugomoramū*

The sickly crow must finally nestle in her sickly nest

草の背を乗り継ぐ風が行方かな

*Kusa no se o noritsugu kaze no yukue kana*

Riding from one blade of grass to another the wind goes where



***Roadrunner X:3***

**-October 2010-**

**<http://www.roadrunnerjournal.net/>**



*Roadrunner* by <http://www.roadrunnerjournal.net/> is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/).