

Hirabayashi Taiko: Issues of Subjectivity in Japanese Women's Autobiography in Fiction

Thesis

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Abstract

Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972) has often been viewed as a feminist and proletarian writer. However, especially in her early writing, Hirabayashi's works, while certainly containing aspects that are critical of society, also address aspects that are seemingly quite personal, subjective, and less ideological in scope and nature. In examining her earlier works, a reader can see that certain events in Hirabayashi's life have affected her writing profoundly, such as the loss of her child shortly after childbirth. From an unorthodox perspective, Hirabayashi's early works can be seen as autobiographical fiction, albeit fiction in which the personal and political will be indistinguishable.

This thesis will examine Hirabayashi's early works and their interpretive possibilities as they relate to the literary genres of *shi-shōsetsu*, autobiographical fiction, and the proletarian novel, specifically within the context of a woman writer.

Hirabayashi's early works present a new type of 'proletarian personal novel,' a novel that is strikingly embodied with raw detail, even to the point of grotesqueness. She provides a rare sexuality and power in her writings for a woman of her time. This thesis agrees with Linda Flores's "Reading the Maternal Body in the Works of Hirabayashi Taiko" in several aspects, but disagrees that Hirabayashi's works simply manifest left-wing and feminist ideology through female embodiment.

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Chapter 1: Issues of Autobiography

Hirabayashi Taiko (1905-1972) has often been viewed as a feminist and proletarian writer. As such, her work has been analyzed from mainly ideological perspectives. However, especially in her early writing, Hirabayashi's works, while certainly containing aspects that are critical of society (both in terms of capitalism and male power structures), also address aspects that are seemingly quite personal, subjective, and less ideological in scope and nature. In examining her earlier works, a reader can see that certain events in Hirabayashi's life have affected her writing profoundly, such as the loss of her child shortly after childbirth. From an unorthodox perspective, Hirabayashi's early works can be seen as autobiographical fiction, albeit fiction in which the personal and political will are indistinguishable.

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1927 show a particular type of personal proletarian novel, a novel which takes traumatic aspects of ones life and through fiction transforms them, even if slightly, into a more positive experience. This chapter of the thesis examines different theories of autobiography and autobiographical fiction to wrestle with and appreciate Hirabayashi's idiosyncratic works.

Autobiography: Phillipe Lejeune

One of the most influential writers on autobiography is Philippe Lejeune. Lejeune's works have framed much of the discussion on autobiography in the West. His works and ideas, founded upon study of Western works, provide an interesting structure for examining autobiographical works. One of his main ideas concerns the mutual 'contract' between a reader and an author. This contract determines what genre the reader will read (i.e. fiction, autobiography, etc.). The genre determines the reader's response. Lejeune writes:

We see, moreover, the importance of the contract, in that it actually determines the attitude of the reader; if the identity is not stated positively (as in fiction), the reader will attempt to establish resemblances, in spite of the author; if it is positively stated (as in autobiography), the reader will want to look for differences (errors, deformations, etc.) (14).

The reader automatically looks for similarities and differences between the author's life and what is represented within the text. A work of fiction can be 'exact' (where the protagonist resembles the author), and an autobiography can be 'inexact' (where the protagonist differs from the author) (14). Lejeune claims that there is no difference between an autobiography and an autobiographical novel, except that an autobiographical novel 'breaks' the contract between the author and reader. Lejeune expands on this point,

explaining how a reader reacts to what seems to be an autobiographical narrative. He writes:

Confronted with what looks like an autobiographical narrative, the reader often tends to think of himself as a detective, that is to say, to look for breaches of contract (whatever the contract). It is here that the myth of the novel being 'truer' than the autobiography originates; when we think we have discovered something through the text, in spite of the author, we always accord it more truth and more profundity (14).

The classic view of autobiographical fiction, as expounded by Lejeune, claims that such fiction is disingenuous and breaks the contract between author and reader. However, such theories might be inadequate in examining women's autobiographical fiction.

Women's Autobiography: Agency within a Dominant Discourse

Despite Lejeune's influence, his theories do not adequately address some types of novels. One example is, of course, the autobiographical novel. These types of works seem to "break the contract," as Lejeune notes. The memoir and diary, overly autobiographic works, have been placed within women's literature (Bunkers 5).

Conceivably due to their lesser position within the overarching male framework of literature, women writers have been criticized for making their work too autobiographical (i.e. not having enough talent to create truly imaginative fiction). Here one can see implications for analysis of Hirabayashi's own 'fictional' works. What is the value of an author who incorporates extensive autobiographical materials into her works? What do women have to gain by writing autobiography? Leigh Gilmore in her article "Autobiographics," examines the ways in which women can use autobiography as a way to gain agency within a dominant (male) framework.¹ If women are generally viewed as 'objects' within common discourse, autobiography provides an opportunity for women to

¹ Of course, this could certainly apply to any group that is pushed aside from the public discourse.

use subjectivity to their own benefit, to use their writing of events as a way to reclaim agency over the events they have experienced.

Gilmore writes that her work “builds from that critique to analyze how women use self-representation and its constitutive possibilities for agency and subjectivity to become no longer primarily subject to exchange but subjects who exchange the position of object for the subjectivity of self-representational agency” (183). This raises the question as whether the biography, commonly thought of as objective, or the more subjective autobiographical fiction is a better representation of women. The act of writing autobiographical fiction provides opportunities for a writer to shape events to her will. Gilmore concludes: “Thus the ways in which an autobiography variously acknowledges, resists, embraces, rejects objectification, the way s/he learns, that is, to interpret objectification as something less than simply subjectivity itself marks a place of agency” (183). Autobiography could ultimately be called subjective as well, showing that subjective autobiographical fiction is just as valid a representation of an author’s life. The woman writer, who might be objectified within other works, becomes a person in charge of her own depiction within a work.

Furthermore, scholars of autobiography have greatly challenged the line between fiction and autobiography. Donna Stanton explores this idea in her work “Augyphony.” She writes, “the past was never a presence, only an absence; thus its textual substance necessarily involved a creation, an invention at the moment of enunciation” (135). As Stanton argues, autobiography is already fictional. Even when writing a factual autobiography, the facts of that autobiography are in a sense already fictional; they are recreated by the author, and therefore are not strictly objective representations of the

facts. Stanton continues her discussion of autobiography: “[the facts of the invented past] produced, through a set of conventions similar to those of the realistic novel, the effect or impression of a referential narrative” (135). The ‘invented past’ of the autobiography can become a fictional, ‘realistic’ novel. In this way, scholars have questioned whether there really is any difference between an autobiography and fiction. Hirabayashi’s autobiographical fiction does function as a form of autobiography, an autobiography that is in some ways more free than a strict autobiography, which at least pretends to be ‘the whole truth and nothing but the truth’ (even if this is not the case). Stanton concludes with an interesting piece of word play claiming that “belief in the truth-value of autobiography, which centuries of writers had claimed for their texts, or even some undefinable alloy of ‘design of truth’...this theory of facticity heralded the ficticity of autobiography” (135-6). Hirabayashi’s fictional autobiographical works may have presented her with a way to present her traumatic past experiences, in a forum just as ‘objective’ as autobiography.

Autobiography: Narrating ‘I’ and the ‘I’ Novel

The writing of autobiography can be subjective, and the author *does* shape events to his or her own choosing. In particular, one sub-genre of literature of autobiographical writings that seems to defy Lejeune’s contract between the reader and the author would be in Japanese *shi-shōsetsu* (I-novel). Tomi Suzuki summarizes the concept in *Narrating the Self*, saying that the I-novel, or *shi-shōsetsu*, generally is “an autobiographical narrative in which the author is thought to recount faithfully the details of his or her personal life in a thin guise of fiction” (1). Of course, much has been made over the differences between Western and Japanese concepts of self and fiction in terms of I-

novels. One example is Edward Fowler in his book *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-Century Japanese Fiction*. Fowler posits ‘traditional Japan’ as a natural source for the I-novel. In other words, the ‘indigenous’ culture of Japan favored the types of writing (personal narrative) that would provide a good source for the later I-novel.² Fowler writes, “In a culture [Japanese culture] that views ‘reality’ only as immediate experience of the natural world, literature not surprisingly becomes a chronicling or transcribing of that experience rather than an imaginative reconstruction of it” (12). Fowler contrasts Japanese culture and distinguishes it from Western ideas of fiction. He further argues that an I-novel is a more logical outgrowth of Japanese culture than the traditional novel. He writes, “And in a culture that views human relations as a predetermined part of the natural order, a fictional form such as the novel, which thrives on fluidity in human relations, is clearly out of place. Traditional Japan was such a culture; so, to a considerable degree, were Meiji and Taisho Japan” (12). However, Suzuki criticizes Fowler’s idea of the I-novel. She writes:

In [his] recent major study of the I-novel...Edward Fowler emphasizes its ‘intrinsic’ narratological features, features he claims are rooted in an ‘indigenous linguistic and epistemological tradition’ that values only ‘immediate, lived experience’...The continuity that Fowler emphasizes between the *shi-shōsetsu* and the ‘indigenous tradition,’ however, is the direct result as well as a sophisticated reinforcement of what I call I-novel discourse, the explanatory and analytical narrative schema that retroactively constructed the ‘indigenous’ tradition according to the I-novel paradigm (4).

The typical discourse on the I-novel presents the ‘indigenous’ culture of Japan as special, emphasizing ‘immediate lived experience.’ This ‘justifies’ the autobiographical nature of

² Suzuki makes an interesting point about the tradition of personal narrative in Japan in respect to Heian women’s literature. She claims that these types of works (*Sarashina Diary*, *Diary of Murasaki Shikibu*, etc.) were read as personal narratives after the rise of the Japanese Naturalist movement. Before that, these works were considered part of the *waka* tradition (189).

the I-novel and presents it separate from the Western tradition of fiction. Of course, one of the most famous examples of this type of discourse (which Suzuki claims as having fictionalized continuity between the I-novel and the indigenous traditions), is in Donald Keene's *Dawn to the West*. Keene writes, "The death of the 'I novel' has frequently been proclaimed, both by practitioners of 'pure fiction' and by those who insist on a writer's social commitment, but it has remained the most typical form of Japanese writing... This concern for the author has a long history in Japan" (551). Keene also claims the ubiquitous nature of the I-novel in Japanese literature, claiming that even the poet Bashō could be considered an I-novel.

The orthodox discourse on the I-novel has been criticized for its unnatural emphasis on the 'uniqueness' of the Japanese tradition. As Suzuki writes, "From the 1920's the I-novel meta-narrative not only defined the modern Japanese novel as a form that directly transcribed the author's lived experience but also emphasized the confessional, self-exploratory, autobiographical nature of the 'indigenous' Japanese literary tradition" (3). On the other hand, the Western tradition of the novel is described "with such highly Western, romantic terms and phrases as 'immediacy,' 'directness,' 'lyricism,' 'spiritual search for the self,' 'unity with nature'" (3). Suzuki writes, "Both detractors and eulogizers of the I-novel, who unwittingly collaborated in characterizing the I-novel as direct, immediate, and factual as opposed to fictional, projected these same notions of directness and factuality on the so called indigenous tradition and emphasized its continuity with the I-novel" (3). The I-novel is placed in a 'special' place, as a result of the 'indigenous' tradition, removed from the rest of the world's autobiographical tradition. Perhaps this type of discourse is natural for the Western scholar confronted

with a form of literature that seems foreign. However, it ignores certain factors of universality within literary traditions, including the urge to write from personal experiences.

Instead of analyzing the I-novel as something unique to Japan, analyzing it within the discourse of autobiographical literature is more productive. Suzuki criticized the dichotomy drawn between Western and Eastern literature. The oppositional theory posits that the indigenous Japanese culture emphasizes self-exploration, and ‘factual’ representation, hence novels which detail the author’s life. However, all works of biography/autobiography could be seen as ‘fictionalized’ in the aforementioned sense. Instead of examining the I-novel as unique, it makes more sense to locate the ‘I’ within the culture that creates these works. To use Lejeune’s formation, the contract between the reader and author, while it may seem counterintuitive, requires that the writer must choose a character for his/her ‘I,’ in other words, the narrator of the story. William C. Spengemann puts it another way in *The Forms of Autobiography: Episodes in the History of a Literary Genre*, arguing that in autobiography the ‘I’ is “only a convenient term for someone who has no real being” (xvi). Once again, theory seems to suggest that the narrator is really a created fiction by the author. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson in their work *Reading Autobiography* examine the narration of ‘I’ in autobiography. They write concerning the ‘narrating I’ and the “*ideological notion of the ‘I’* affecting the self-narrator” (168). They argue that a reader must examine what it means to be an individual at the time when the author was writing. While this concept may seem simple, how people define themselves, and how that is translated into an autobiographical work varies greatly by time period and culture, for example, the works by women writers

during Japan's Heian Period. Smith and Watson present a series of questions to examine when looking at autobiographical works such as, "How do changing notions of 'I'-ness or personhood affect the self-narrative [the reader] is reading and interpreting?" (168). In examining autobiographies and autobiographical fiction, a reader must consider just how the 'narrating I' is defined within the author's own time period and culture.

The notions of personhood must be examined in examining the work. Similarly, the concept of the narrator, the concept of autobiography itself, must be examined. As discussed, it is not the case that the concept of an autobiographical novel is unique to Japanese culture. However, the expectations of the reader (including critics) form the contract between reader and author, and thus, the 'culture' of a particular I-novel must be taken into account in forming a pact between the author and reader, in short, in reading the work.

Hirabayashi's Place in Proletarian Literature: The Subjectivity of Women

Hirabayashi's works are remarkable for their particular formation within the time period and the ideology of the reader for which she wrote her works. She is associated with the Japanese proletarian literary movement (1921-1934) (Shea Contents).

Hirabayashi is perhaps best known as a female proletarian writer, due to the ideological framework of her works. Linda Flores writes: "[Hirabayashi's] political and artistic beliefs notwithstanding, Hirabayashi's works were often evaluated according to the principles of the proletarian literary movement" (24). Flores further claims: "The theories and ideologies associated with the movement profoundly influenced readings of her work, a fact reflected not only in methods of interpretation, but also in the use of the language of the proletarian literary movement" (24). The literary critic Kobayashi Hideo

discussed the main aspects of proletarian literature within the Japanese context. He claimed that a main aspect of proletarian literature was that it was disembodied. He argued that the Marxist movement had challenged the Naturalist movement's focus on the personal life of the author, instead using Marxist ideology to take everyday life and put it within historical context. Kobayashi writes in Flores's translation:

Never before had writers labored to create by relying so on ideas and theories; again, never before had writers so completely ignored their actual, physical lives. It is not just that they had forgotten how to embody or to internalize an idea. Rather, being intoxicated on a system of thought too bloodless to allow any real internalization or embodiment, our Marxist literary movement was defined, in essence, by its intoxication effects (Flores 23).

Kobayashi makes a claim about Marxist literature that removes such literature from the world of the embodied, from the world of the personal. He sets up proletarian works as very different from the Japanese Naturalist movement, from the Japanese I-novel.

One example of a prototypical proletarian work might be Kaneko Yōbun's representative work "Jigoku (Hell)." This story describes a village's uprising against the semi-feudal conditions in their town. The village has suffered a terrible drought and the rice seedlings are dying. The villagers hold a conference to discuss asking for aid from the local landlord, Sakata, who own a patch of land with a hot-spring. Sakata brutally turns the negotiating committee away, denying them their request of lower farm rent and a rice donation. When Sakata asks if the farmers are robbers and Bolsheviks, the farmers respond by saying that there is nothing wrong with bolshevism. Heikichi, one of the farmers, discovers Sakata sleeping with his (Heikichi's) wife and turns Sakata over to the fury of the

farmers, who are angry at him for his desecration of their prayers for rain. The mob leaves the village as it begins to rain (Shea 94-7). This story contains the prototypical proletarian literature: disembodied class-warfare between the landowner and the workers. The focus is on the revolt of the peasants against Sakata, the historical uprising of the masses. The only embodied character within the tale is Sakata and his lustful, fat, ogre type nature.

Hirabayashi in some ways was very different from the typical proletarian writer. One way in which Hirabayashi's works are so very different from some proletarian literature is that her works are very embodied; they often deal with the body in ways that are very graphic and sometimes even horrific. However, these depictions include depictions of the protagonist and her female body, not just of the villain rich man in the tale. Flores writes: "In this respect, the works of Hirabayashi Taiko occupy a unique position within the body of proletarian literature. Hirabayashi Taiko's stories contest evaluations of proletarian literature as literature that portrayed only the suffering of the masses" (24). Hirabayashi's works are far more personal than the stereotypical image of proletarian writing. In fact, not only are her works about suffering on a personal level, they are works that deal with her own personal narrative. Hirabayashi is a proletarian writer, but is not unduly influenced by the demands of the genre for which she is writing. She is conscious of her political identity, but uses her own personal story to influence the way she presents that identity. Hirabayashi herself writes about the struggle between personal experience and literature, and the doctrine of the leftist movement. In Hirabayashi's essay, "*Seryōshitsu nite' no koro,*" which discusses the time in which she wrote 'In the Charity Ward,' the author furthers her discussion of this gap between

ideology and literature saying, “I was an author who held traces of influence from the doctrine of a common sense of purpose of the time, but on the whole I wrote according to my artistic beliefs” (101).³ Hirabayashi has included herself within proletarian literature, even if that literature was not always accepting of such an inclusion.

The best way in which Hirabayashi’s works are linked to the I-novel is in their personal, autobiographical nature. Hirabayashi’s early works in 1927 are directly linked to a personal ‘I,’ a narrative ‘I,’ which was often tied to her own experience (e.g. the death of a child). Flores suggests that Hirabayashi’s works provide an essential bridge between disembodied proletarian writing and feminist theory.⁴ She claims that Hirabayashi’s fiction, and her often graphic depictions of childbirth/death, “suggests an alternate strategy for reading the body and sexuality, one that holds potential to bridge the divide between what has been described as the ‘unhappy marriage’ between feminism and Marxism”(27). Flores, however, does not go quite far enough in her analysis of Hirabayashi’s works. Hirabayashi’s works do not just show the ‘body’ in proletarian literature (disproving the idea of disembodied proletarian literature), they also show evidence of Hirabayashi’s own embodied life. Hirabayashi draws upon her own troubled experiences, and transforms them through fiction into more meaningful events, events which have ideological purpose; but more than ideological, these stories show a very personal look into the author’s own life and her experiences. One sees how Hirabayashi is capable of making her experiences, if not less painful, at least more insightful.

³ All translations of Hirabayashi’s own works have been done by me personally with the support of my advisor, Richard Torrance. All mistakes are my own.

⁴ Once again we find that the embodied, the personal, seems to provide women writers access to a dominant male discourse.

Hirabayashi provides as a female author a different type of genre: the proletarian personal novel, a novel taken from her own personal experiences, yet still critiquing the capitalist system. In the following chapters, by examining several events of Hirabayashi's own life, and her works from 1927, one sees several clear themes emerge: childbirth, miscarriage or the death/murder of the child, and less than ideal relationships with men. By looking at the relationship between these early works and the author's own life, Hirabayashi's place as a proletarian, but personal novelist becomes much clearer.

Chapter 2: Hirabayashi's Life as Literature

Issues of autobiography in woman's writing are complex, and Hirabayashi's works present an important window into the particular importance of woman's autobiographical fiction written in a politicized historical context. This thesis argues that the most important of Hirabayashi Taiko's early works can be viewed as a kind of proletarian personal novel. Some may see this as a generic contradiction. Through these early works, a reader can discern the aspects of Hirabayashi's life that were very traumatic and influential in her writing. What clearly stands out is Hirabayashi's loss of her infant child, which presents itself in several of her writings (e.g. "In the Charity Room," "Yokaze" (trans. Evening Wind)), and her various relationships to men. By examining her biography in detail, aspects of her life which influenced her writing, especially her early writing, will be examined.

Hirabayashi's early life reveals characteristics that would later translate into political activism. She was born in Suwa, in Nagano prefecture, to a poor family (Nihon Kindai 135). She was part of a crumbling middle class, a position which would later influence her ideas on conventional morality and customs. Her family had previously been of the local gentry, but had fallen upon hard times when her grandfather's investments in the spinning industry failed. The family relied on several methods to support themselves, including having Hirabayashi's father (the adopted son of the grandfather) go to Korea to make money, and Hirabayashi's mother earning money by farming and running a general store. Her grandfather had been a participant in the

Liberal Party. Hirabayashi herself read books from her brother-in-law's collection, which included works by Tolstoy and Dostoevsky. Her impoverished family background as a child was first reflected in her writing after entering Suwa Women's Higher School in 1918 (135). Shu-Mei Lin discusses this period of women's education in Japan:

These higher schools for girls, which provided secondary education to women in prewar Japan, primarily trained women of middle-class and higher status to become 'good wives and wise mothers.' As a result, course content -with emphasis placed on homemaking skills...differed significantly from that offered at schools for boys. Around 1918 only a few young women -about 6 percent of those who graduated from normal elementary schools -continued their educations at these higher schools (37).

Hirabayashi showed her strength of character in her decision to go on to higher school; both because girls of limited means had to study hard in order to enter this elite course of women's education and because she enrolled there despite the protests of her mother, who objected to Hirabayashi, the daughter of an impoverished family, continuing her education when she would be better served by going to work. Once enrolled, Hirabayashi used her time not in improving her homemaking skills, but rather in continuing her avid reading and studying Japanese realist authors (*Shizenshagi-ha*). While attending school, Hirabayashi studied under Tsuchiya Fumiaki (b. 1890), and began reading the works of realist writers such as Shiga Naoya, Kunikida Doppo, and Zola (Nihon Kindai 135, Abe 5). This time period after World War I and the flourishing of capitalism spurred a new era of social philosophy in Japan. Lin describes this period in her biography of Hirabayashi:

Demands for freedom and the rise of a new middle class of white-collar workers had been produced by a wartime expansion of the economy in the mid-Taisho period, and this was to be the age of the "Taisho Democracy." The expanding social roles of the intelligentsia and the working class also

encouraged a surge in socialist activities, and in 1920 the Japan Socialist League was formed (37).

This movement influenced Hirabayashi's studies. She also read the work of a Christian labor activist, Kagawa Toyohiko's *Shisen o koete* (Crossing the Death Line, 1920) and Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, although in flawed translation (Abe 5). Realizing the seriousness of problems of social inequality, she wrote her first work "*Aru yo*" (A Certain Night, 1922) at the age of 16 (Abe 6, 43). In part to pursue her interest in politics, in part to pursue her aspiration to write, and probably motivated by a desire to leave the provinces and enter Japan's center of intellectual activity, Hirabayashi moved to Tokyo after graduation. Showing the first signs of her tendency to associate with men of various 'dangerous' left-wing backgrounds, Hirabayashi was fired from her job as a telephone operator for calling, while on the job, Sakai Toshihiko (1870-1933), a radical socialist who would later become the chairman of the Japan Communist Party. She had long been an admiring reader of Sakai. Sakai found a job for her at the Japan-Germany Book Company, where Hirabayashi met another man who would become influential in her life, Yamamoto Torazō, an anarchist (Abe 7). This man and the resulting experiences she had while with him would greatly influence Hirabayashi's writing.

The 'dangerous' nature of Hirabayashi's associations would soon become clear. After the great earthquake of 1923, there was a roundup of radical elements during a period of martial law (Abe 7). Hirabayashi was then involved with Yamamoto Torazō, a young anarchist of little renown. Hirabayashi was ironically drawn towards his lack of world renown and public fame. Now eighteen, she began "to affirm everything that society rejected. She and [Yamamoto] –a naïve, weak-willed young man only a year

older than she -began an impulsive life together, playing at being anarchists without any real prospects for effecting social change or artistic achievement” (Lin 38). Their relationship and its dangerous associations, however, did have powerful consequences on Hirabayashi’s life. The two were arrested during the period of martial law in 1923 and ordered to leave Tokyo after being released from prison. Together they traveled to Dalian, Manchuria (Abe 7-8). Hirabayashi worked as a cook for Chinese railway construction workers for several months, but the two were then arrested for political subversion. Yamamoto was incarcerated, but Hirabayashi, who was eight months pregnant and sick with beriberi and night blindness, was released. She gave birth to a baby girl, her only biological child (Nihon Kindai 135). Due to malnutrition, however, the child died shortly after. This event seems to have dramatically affected her life and is retold in the story “In the Charity Ward.” This theme of losing a child is also seen in several other of her early works, as will be discussed below.

After this traumatic event, Hirabayashi returned to Japan alone and associated with various anarchist groups and began “wandering from one man to another, from one place to the next” (Mulhern 126). She became involved with somewhat radical men from the avant-garde artistic movement (Abe 9). Hirabayashi became ensnared in the basic conflict between earning a living, forming relationships with men, and her artistic pursuits (Lewell 110). She certainly seems to have chosen once again men who lived on the radical fringes of society. These men became associated with the term ‘black criminals,’ a term coined in the anarchist magazine “*Aka to Kuro*” (Red and Black) in 1923, and a term that was used to denote the belief that the activities of the members of the black criminals were essential in creating Shōwa literature (Lin 39). Hirabayashi’s

relationships with these men of the avant-garde, at a time in her life when she flitted from man to man, seem to have influenced her early writing significantly.

In particular, Hirabayashi's relationship with Iida Tokutarō was tumultuous and had an impact on her fiction. The relationship began in 1925 and continued for approximately one and half years, but it was not a pleasant relationship (Abe 9-10). Iida forced Hirabayashi to work as a waitress, and even made her engage in prostitution so that Iida could borrow money from them. During this time period, Hirabayashi's female friendship with poet and novelist Hayashi Fumiko materialized. Perhaps in response to negative relationships with men, the two formed a fast friendship after working in the same café. After Hirabayashi broke off her relationship with Iida, the two women lived together, working at small part-time jobs and trying to sell their writings. John Lewell wrote in *Modern Japanese Novelists: A Biographical Dictionary*:

An aspiring writer, working in menial jobs and similarly exploited by a succession of lovers, Hayashi Fumiko became a lifelong friend. She taught Taiko how to sell stories to magazines, and, by example, was an inspiration to her. But whereas Fumiko found stability in a lasting relationship and soon became self-supporting as a writer, Taiko had greater difficulty (110).

Hirabayashi's rather difficult relationships with men are reflected best in her work "Azakeru" (Self-Mockery, 1987), which is told in first person (as in "In the Charity Ward"), and recount a "woman whose body has been transformed by urban life into a marketable commodity" (Lin 39). Shu-Mei Lin also notes that Hirabayashi "wrote several detective stories at about the same time, and the social content of her works in this genre, which depict the obliteration of all traces of the individual by the masses of the city, are not far different from what Hirabayashi presents in 'Self-Mockery'" (39).

The experiences of this time period seem to have had quite an influence on Hirabayashi. Chieko I. Mulhern describes “Self-Mockery” as a “testimony to [Hirabayashi’s] tempestuous life between 1923 and 1926, describing her experience of living with exploitive, egotistic, and dependent men” (127). In these stories and the experience they depict, a reader can perhaps understand Hirabayashi’s turbulent and sometimes disastrous relationships with radical and often ‘dangerous’ men.

In 1927 Hirabayashi joined the Proletarian Artistic League, but withdrew the following year because she believed that the league was being used by young men out of university to further Communist ideology. She “resented especially their attitude that literature must be subservient to politics,” showing that for Hirabayashi literature was still as important as the politics that might lurk behind that literature (Keene 1160).

Hirabayashi wrote about this attitude in her autobiography *Sabaku no Hana* (Flower in the Desert, 1957):

It wasn’t that I particularly hated the Communist party. However, regarding literature, the party only puts out unreasonable demands. They said things like that we absolutely had to write about the lives of the workers, and that in the case of a battle between workers and capitalists, we had to write it so that the worker would win. Besides those, there were many other rules, and works that did not fit those rules were torn apart at discussion meetings and such. At the very least, I did not trust the Communist party in respect to art (208-9).

Hirabayashi seems to have made her choice between politics and art. While politics continued to be a very important part of her work (in fact her later work seems to be more ‘objective’), it was important for her that art was still at the forefront of discussions. For Hirabayashi, “political ideology should not infringe on artistic production and...art should never be slave to political ideology” (Flores 24).

Shortly after her split with the cultural organization, Nappu, or Zen Nihon Musansha Geijutsu Renmei, of the orthodox Communist Party, she allied herself with the less doctrinaire Rōnō Geijutsuka Renmei and became one of the leading authors of that leftist organization's journal *Bungei Sensen* (Literary Battle Front, 1924-32). Her postwar split with the Communist Party and alliance with the socialists stemmed in part from the earlier split between those who believed that Japan had not yet undergone a bourgeois revolution (Nappu) and those who held that the Meiji Restoration had constituted such a revolution (Rōnō-ha) (Abe 11-2, *Nihon Kindai* 136).⁵

In 1927, Hirabayashi married Kobori Jinji (1901-59), a Marxist member of the journal *Bungei Sensen* (*Nihon Kindai* 136). While this marriage signaled the end of Hirabayashi's unstable relationships with various men and enabled Hirabayashi to continue her writing, this relationship was not without its problems. Involved in the 1937 political roundup of radicals, called the Popular Front Affair, Kobori was wanted for questioning and went into hiding (*Nihon Kindai* 136). Hirabayashi was detained, and even after Kobori turned himself in, was kept there for eight months, released only after she became very sick with pleurisy and peritonitis. Kobori nursed her back to health. Because of her illness and her very slow road to recovery, Hirabayashi did not write anything from 1938 to 1945 (*Nihon Kindai* 137). After this time of rest, however, she truly began to make her mark in literary circles. Hirabayashi also began to cut her ties to left wing politics. Her stories after the war (many of which are what gained her a reputation as a writer) were all published in magazines for the general public, instead of those aimed more directly at participants in left wing politics. Hirabayashi strongly

⁵ For more information on these groups, see G.T. Shea's *Leftwing Literature in Japan: A Brief History of the Proletarian Literary Movement*, Chapter 9.

showed her own independence and the fact that she would not simply follow the party line when in 1949 she wrote a scathing article in *Shinchō* against the Communist Party (Abe 23-4).

In terms of Hirabayashi's relationships with men, which will be examined in more detail below, her common-law marriage with Kobori seemed to progress fairly well. Her relationship with Kobori was relatively peaceful, but it did not end happily. After news of Kobori's affairs and unfaithfulness appeared in the media, the two divorced in 1955 (Abe 28). After Kobori died in 1959, Hirabayashi learned that Kobori's then wife and child were left destitute, so she helped the two find housing, showing that Hirabayashi's female solidarity was fairly strong, even with a 'rival' wife, who in fact used to be Hirabayashi's own housemaid before the divorce (Abe 28, Mulhern 127). After World War II, Hirabayashi published several influential works including "Hitori iku" (I Go Alone, 1946), "Kō yu onna" (This Kind of Woman, 1946), and "Mō Chūgoku hei" (Blind Chinese Soldiers, 1946), and several others. Hirabayashi also wrote an actual autobiography, *Sabaku no hana* (Flower in the Desert, 1957). Hirabayashi died of pneumonia in 1972, well known for her later works. It is in her early works, however, that a reader feels most immediately the desperate and traumatic events that impacted not only her writing, but also the lives of many of the idealistic young women of her generation. Perhaps more so than an actual autobiography, her early works gave her a chance to 'rewrite' her life and make it one of her own choosing.

Chapter 3: Childbirth and Tragedy

In examining Hirabayashi's life, several aspects strike the reader. There seem to be several moments of her life that defined who she was. One of these events is the loss of her child in Manchuria during her stay in the charity hospital or ward. The child's birth and subsequent death due to lack of available milk to substitute for breast milk, seems to have had a rather large impact on how she viewed herself and her writing. This aspect of her writing can be seen in several of her early works, perhaps most strikingly in her 1927 short story "In the Charity Ward." However, other stories, such as the short story "Evening Wind" (also 1927) also display her attitudes towards childbirth, society, and the men involved with childbirth. These stories are obviously based, to varying extents, on the real life story of Hirabayashi. They also provide the author with moments to present her thoughts, feelings and decisions, to give commentary on her situation in a way she would be unable to do in real life. They also provide the author with a means to 'change the past.' Neither of these stories is particularly happy, nor does either of them end with a happy ending. However, they do provide opportunities for the author to make changes, however small, in autobiographical works, which perhaps allows for change and catharsis within the author's own life.

In the Charity Ward (1927)

Perhaps the most exact example of Hirabayashi's I novel approach to proletarian literature is in her story "Seryōshitsu nite," or "In the Charity Ward." This story directly relates the story of a woman in Manchuria giving birth to, and losing a child because of malnutrition. The story reflects Hirabayashi's own personal narrative. On one hand, aspects from her and her lover's fleeing of Tokyo and going to Manchuria are depicted. The protagonist, Mitsuyo, and her husband are arrested for political subversion, for the act of plotting a railway strike. Even though her husband is imprisoned, Mitsuyo, who is pregnant, is allowed to give birth in a charity hospital. The couple depicted clearly had the same sort of ideological framework as Hirabayashi, and this certainly relates to how the story becomes a personal narrative for her. However, more striking and poignant is the part of the story concerning the protagonist's loss of her child. The protagonist, the '*watashi*' or 'I' of the story, gives birth within a charity hospital. The birth itself is related in a way that seems to recount the horrible conditions of the hospital and the lack of care provided to those who give birth there.

At five o'clock in the morning, the head nurse, who had come down from the second floor to the toilet, discovered me in labor and on top of a single old, stained futon I bore a baby girl as red as a monkey. Her closed eyes formed tiny threads that curved upward. After five minutes passed, her silk-like hair hung down on her forehead making her face look long (97).

However, the 'I' of the story is sick with beriberi and cannot feed her own child her milk. Furthermore, the hospital will not give her substitute milk to feed her child. Therefore, the protagonist is forced to make a choice and chooses to feed the child her breast milk, even knowing that the disease might be transmitted to her daughter and that the daughter might be in danger of dying. She came to this decision after seeing the uncaring way that

the hospital director values the price of the medicine, more so than the lives of his non-paying patients. It is only the paying patients who receive good medical care. Faced with this kind of world where soon mother and daughter will be separated anyway with the mother's imminent transport to prison, the protagonist finally decides on her course of action.

The inescapable conclusion that I would have to feed my child my impure milk blew desolately through my heart like a cold wind.

Breast milk rushed out of my nipples with a frightening force and volume. The pain of swollen breasts had reached all the way to my shoulders this morning. It was the feeling of pus in part of my body. Three times during the night I had had the child suckle at my breasts, and the child's tongue and the sucking force of her throat pleasantly enticed milk from my breast (102).

When the protagonist asks the nurse about the condition of her child, the nurse simply replies, "I'm so sorry for you. At just four o'clock your child passed away" (105). To which the protagonist simply replies, "Oh, is that so" (105). This scene can hardly be called disembodied or dispassionate. The scene describes a mother who has surpassed even despair, and can only feel nothingness. The scene continues with more discussion about the nurse. The narrator says, "I tried to match my response to the nurse's quiet voice and her cheerful attitude, I answered as if I were unperturbed, as if nothing had happened. But in truth, I no longer felt anything" (105). This very personal story for Hirabayashi allows the author to describe a painful experience and her own reasoning behind her actions. While the protagonist herself may become dispassionate by the end of the tale, this fact does not discount the moving nature of the story itself.

This story is truly a personal account of a mother's loss, where the narrator, the 'I' makes a large personal decision about her child's life. At the same time, the story is also

a commentary on a society that allowed this event to happen. The 'I' of the story uses her background and thoughts on socialism in coming to her decision. The protagonist contemplates a parent's strong desire to feed his or her children and what she, the protagonist, should do in this situation where there is no way to save her child.

I felt that I had become one dimensional, cut off from the past and future like a flat piece of paper. In any case, for a time we were mother and child. From here, the fact that I would go to prison stood like a wall between us. In prison, when the child matured a little, he or she was separated from the mother. I could not let the child experience the gloomy life of prison. Moreover, the authorities held that even if the mother sins, the child is sinless. Thus, keeping the child in prison would be an illegal confinement and the child had to be expelled from prison. Just how, in this society of individualism, tearing a child from its mother constitutes freedom is a question. According to the law, for a mother in prison, all things, like a beloved child, should be lost, and the only meaning is in restriction. When I thought it through to this point, I discovered myself trapped by an inescapable nihilism that was out of my control.

The socialist me had withered with the prospect of my entering prison. It had surely withered. This pitiable self-consciousness drove me to despair (102-3).

For the protagonist, and perhaps for Hirabayashi, their socialist fortitude might have suffered upon entering the charity ward. However, the awful and unfair behavior of the people in charge of the ward causes the protagonist to rethink and reclaim her position as a woman who is able to make a choice for her child, even a very difficult choice. She addresses herself saying, "You are a woman! Believe in the future. If you have a deep love for your child, it is precisely because of its depth that you must pledge to continue the struggle" (103). Hirabayashi combines the political and the personal in a very moving and detailed fashion.

However, just because the story is personal does not mean that Hirabayashi pulls any punches in her attack on the hypocritical nature of the charity ward. Supposedly it is

a Christian run hospital where future prisoners, like the protagonist and others who are down on their luck, can receive free medical care. In reality only the paying patients receive expensive medicine and good care. Hirabayashi writes about a paying patient, who “paying patient, who didn’t sound ill, singing a popular song around the nurse’s station” (104). This description is contrasted with the descriptions of the terrible conditions of the non-paying, charity patients, such as the protagonist and her child. There are several places where Hirabayashi makes the hypocrisy of the charity hospital clear, but none is as striking as when the hospital Director yells at a nurse for giving the protagonist an expensive medicine. The director says:

You’ve been working as a nurse for more than two years, so you should be able to read German, right?! Once someone’s opened this bottle, the medicine can’t be used again. Do you know how much one gram of this costs? There’s no way this kind of medicine can be used for each and every cerebral anemia at this poor hospital (102).

Previously in the story, the Director’s wife, supposedly a Christian, prayed to God in thanks for being able to help these ‘unfortunate’ people. However, the fact that she is more concerned with money than with the health of her patients, has made the protagonist truly aware of the hypocrisy of the so-called capitalist charity, and therefore the reader too becomes aware of this hypocrisy that Hirabayashi surely wished to demonstrate through her story. In some ways, the story is more compelling as a proletarian work because of the personal aspect of this scene. Her work becomes the embodiment of personal, autobiographical embodied fiction, which also just happens to be proletarian. Flores claims:

Mitsuyo acknowledges her position in the capitalist economy, transcends individual emotion and consciousness, and acquires ideology through her body. Separated from her husband, the protagonist Mitsuyo has nothing

save her own body on which to rely, and therefore she accomplishes ideological resolution through what Ishikawa refers to as her ‘corporeal sensational’ (*shintai kankaku*). These corporeal sensations include labor pains, pain in her breasts, and the physical suffering of gestational beriberi (26).

While it is true that Hirabayashi ‘overcomes’ emotion in this story, as deadened as the protagonist is from sadness at the loss of her baby, it would be untrue to state that ideology overcomes personal emotion. It is the personal emotion and the reminder of the sorry state of life that her child will face when her mother is sent to prison that rekindles the protagonist’s belief in her cause. It is love for her child, the desire to feed her that provides the catharsis of the story.

At the end of the story we see a very different Mitsuyo than at the beginning of the tale. At the beginning she is afraid of prison and terrified at the thought of raising a child there. However, by the end of the story, in the mental state of losing her child, Mitsuyo calmly sends in her paperwork to go to prison. While she may not have any choice in whether or not to go to prison, Mitsuyo has discovered that the charity hospital is not preferable to a prison life. This shows her new resolve and anarchist principles. Chieko I. Mulhern in the book *Japanese Women Writers: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook* claims that this action and diversion from the author’s true experiences “proves Virginia Woolf’s contention that fiction can convey truer reality than mere fact” (129). By showing a different attitude at the end of this traumatic event, Hirabayashi can in fact change an aspect of her own autobiography that perhaps was distasteful to her. She can triumph over a situation that affected her deeply. The protagonist “refuses to play the expected role of a grateful recipient of charity, an insignificant gesture yet perhaps the strongest protest a woman can make under the circumstances” (Mulhern 129).

Hirabayashi has used autobiographical fiction as a way of transforming her own life, and making that life into a more powerful one. She has used what is clearly an event that was deeply emotional and turned it into a story that is very close to her own situation, but still leaves room for transformation. Hirabayashi, through the thoughts of her protagonist, can give meaning and catharsis to a situation that might have seemed meaningless and only painful at the time. She transforms the death of her child into something that, while still painful, represents a meaningful decision of socialist action. Autobiographical fiction provided Hirabayashi and perhaps other women writers a vehicle for self-empowerment and a ‘fiction’ that is truer than their actual autobiographies.

Evening Wind (1927)

“In the Charity Ward” provides perhaps the best and most obvious example of Hirabayashi’s personal narrative influencing her proletarian literature. However, other early works also deal with concepts of pregnancy and child loss, which shows just how deeply the loss of Hirabayashi’s own child must have affected her. One example of such a work is the short story “Yokaze” or “Evening Wind.” Like “In the Charity Ward,” “Evening Wind” contains depictions of pregnancy and childbirth that are shocking, almost to the point of grotesqueness. Like “In the Charity Ward,” the child’s birth is shown in an almost unpleasant way, and the child itself is almost alien to the mother (see previous description in ‘In the Charity Ward’ of the child as like a monkey). This scene depicts the protagonist’s, Osen’s, labor.

From a little past lunch, the uncomfortable stomach pains began, sometimes swirling up, and sometimes disappearing. Osen remembered the seafood she had had for breakfast, and no matter how many times she went to the bathroom, when she stooped over, nothing came out. Then, in

the lower abdomen she was holding down, the fetus pushed on the skin of her stomach, which seemed to be stretched to the breaking point (125).

Flores claims that this scene and others provide evidence of how Hirabayashi's texts "flout conventional notions of motherhood and maternity and disturb the boundaries conventionally delineating these 'sacred' social spaces [such as places of childbirth]" (21). In other words, Flores claims that Hirabayashi is using extremely 'embodied' descriptions (to the point of grotesqueness) as a way of overturning conventions concerning female pregnancy and childbirth. However, claiming this 'feminist' perspective as the only reason for this graphic detail would be over simplifying Hirabayashi's own personal story. These almost grotesque descriptions also show the real impact that the death of her own child seems to have had on Hirabayashi. Flores claims that Hirabayashi is manifesting a feminist ideology through her embodied characters. This, however, ignores the personal aspects of Hirabayashi's proletarian novel; Hirabayashi was in some sense a 'personal' proletariat. What is clear from Hirabayashi's early writings is that pregnancy and birth are not associated as happy events. Certainly, many of Hirabayashi's works are not 'happy' ones. In particular, Hirabayashi's stories that deal with childbirth are striking for their depiction of the real trauma that can result from childbirth.

As in "In the Charity Ward," this story too becomes a story about the choice of a woman to kill her child, and as in "In the Charity Ward," this story also, provides commentary on the society that led her to that choice. In "Evening Wind," Hirabayashi is working with a more fictionalized narrative than in "In the Charity Ward." Still, resemblances are clearly seen (e.g. childbirth, death). To say that Hirabayashi's works are

merely grotesque is to ignore the personal emotion within these works. They certainly offer critiques of society, but those critiques are made from personal experiences, and furthermore, they are made stronger by the personal (and graphic) nature of her works.

This story is about a widow in a farming town who becomes pregnant, not with her husband who recently passed away, but with a day laborer. Her brother, because of the shame she has brought upon the father, physically abuses her throughout the course of her pregnancy, and forbids her from giving birth within the house. Therefore, when it is time for the child to be born, Osen goes to the storehouse to give birth. Because of the shame and the physical abuse delivered upon her and her child, Osen ends up killing the child, although this event is not actually depicted within the story. This scene describes how the reader discovers the child's death.

“What in the world happened?” Suekichi [the brother] asked.

Osen did not answer, but only laughed with a bright voice.

“Tell me what happened!” he asked again.

Suekichi nervously peeped inside and a smell that would gouge out one's nose drifted out.

“The baby was born, and I did this.”

Osen raised up her head with its wild hair and laughed dryly.

When Suekichi looked through the lamplight into the room, he could see a nearby pile wrapped up rags. He unconsciously stepped back. Suekichi could see from between the rags the small face of a child.

“Osen!”

“Aaa-I killed it!...Ha ha ha ha!”

“What?!” Suekichi asked.

Osen sat down on the dirt, one step lower than the room, and laughed terribly. The sound of straw rustling could be heard (139).

For as much vivid detail as Hirabayashi includes in her works, it is this dis-narration that is particularly interesting. For all of the grotesqueness of Hirabayashi's works, she chooses not to describe the actual killing. She does not describe in detail the act of infanticide. This speaks to how Hirabayashi actually viewed the act of the death itself.

Hirabayashi, who could describe many things in graphic detail, for her to not include something of such great importance for the story itself shows that she may have had quite a lot of sympathy for her abused Osen, and for any mother whose baby, for whatever reason, dies. The grotesque Hirabayashi betrays a perhaps personal sentiment in her omission. This story becomes much more than a critique of the protagonist herself, but instead a critique of society, the brother, the people who forced her to make this choice. While perhaps more direct than in “In the Charity Ward,” this story too describes a woman who is forced by society to make a decision that ultimately ends in her child’s death. In Hirabayashi’s description (or lack there of) and the portrayal of the brother and sister, she provides commentary on women who ‘choose’ (or are forced to choose) the death of their children. While not as explicit as in “In the Charity Ward,” “Evening Wind” also provides Hirabayashi a way to attain distance from a terrible event, and use that event in a way that can give social commentary, which might have offered some closure to the author.

Another concept shared by both “In the Charity Ward” and “Evening Wind” is the concept of motherhood/fatherhood and the ideological priorities of those mothers/fathers. Both stories deal with the issue of mothers and the choices that mothers make about their children. What is also interesting in both is the conception of fatherhood. In “In the Charity Ward,” the protagonist’s husband writes to her and asks about the baby’s toes. The protagonist is astonished by the degree of detachment from reality this shows (i.e. her husband shows a greater attachment to his baby and mother than to the cause of socialism). She thinks:

‘Are his toes normal?’ In my heightened emotional state from the morning, this phrase couldn’t help but make me weep. The big toe on my husband, from the time of birth was as thin as a pinky. This letter spoke to me about my husband’s life in prison. I was angered that my incarcerated husband would first consider his wife on the outside and his newborn child, but at the same time, I clung to that fact and this filled me with an unbearable sense of longing (104).

Here Mitsuyo is disgusted with her husband’s lack of conviction concerning socialism, and his focus on the menial aspects of life, such as the length of the baby’s toes. In Hirabayashi’s stories, the women protagonists are stronger and firmer in their convictions, and in the decisions they make. The man, the father of the baby in “Evening Wind,” plays little role in the story itself, and certainly no role in the choice to commit infanticide. Instead the brother, and his abuse, plays a far greater role. The infants themselves in both stories are unnamed and female, and therefore never bear the names of their fathers. In many ways, Hirabayashi has made the foci of these stories the women and their choices. Even in “Evening Wind,” where the brother is less peripheral than the husband in “In the Charity Ward,” it is still the mother and her struggle that are paramount. Flores claims that “Unnamed and extrinsic to the symbolic order, the children [in these stories] are recovered to the space of the maternal body through acts of infanticide. These infanticides, both symbolic and actual...accomplish the symbolic castration of the patriarchy” (29).

Flores overstates the case that Mitsuyo in “In the Charity Ward” commits infanticide. Mitsuyo makes a difficult decision to feed her child breast milk, unsure as to how it will affect the baby. However, her choices are quite limited. Her decision is difficult, and therefore moving, but certainly not an example of infanticide. Also, perhaps more than a ‘castration of patriarchy,’ these stories show a disappointment by

Hirabayashi in the men in her life that, up until this point, men have not helped the situation of childbirth, but have even caused difficulties and the death of those children. Moreover, they are not fully committed to the very revolution they call for. The next chapter will discuss more about Hirabayashi's relationship to men and the impact this had on her stories, but this chapter demonstrates the intricate relationship between Hirabayashi's early women protagonists, their children, and the men in their lives. Hirabayashi's early stories that deal with childbirth and death provide the author a way to 'change the past,' even if that change is very small, and to provide distance and commentary on what must have been a terrible event.

Chapter 4: Life with Men and Children

As mentioned in the previous chapter on childbirth, and evident in the biography of her life, Hirabayashi's relationships with men were far from ideal. Especially in her earlier years, she was involved with radical left-wing activists and artists, who did not always treat her well.. Hirabayashi was even subjected to being sent as a prostitute for her lover, so that they could have money. While in "In the Charity Ward," the protagonist's husband is removed and oblivious to the true horror of his wife's situation. In "Evening Wind," the lover is not even a true character in the work. However, in "Azakeru," often translated as "Self-Mockery, date (? Date?)" the reader sees first hand evidence of the protagonist's relationship with her 'legitimate' lover, as well as the lover she has been forced to prostitute herself to by her 'legitimate' lover. The reader sees the effect this prostitution, and her relationship with the two men have on the protagonist. Furthermore, this story once again provides evidence of the devastating effect that the loss of Hirabayashi's child in Manchuria has had on the author's writing.

"Self-Mockery," as in "In the Charity Ward," provides a very close re-telling of Hirabayashi's own life, and therefore, like "In the Charity Room," also provides Hirabayashi with a forum to provide self-reflection on the events of her life, and to change them, or present them in a slightly different way, so as to give greater purpose and meaning to those events. Hirabayashi is never sentimental in her work; she is, as always, more likely to be graphic and unflinching in her depictions of life. However, "Self-

Mockery” contains a sizable amount of internal monologue from the protagonist, which gives voice to what could possibly be reflections of the author’s own internal thoughts and monologues. “Self-Mockery” is then another way for Hirabayashi to transform the painful experiences of her life and give them more meaning than they perhaps had before.

Self-Mockery (1927)

“Self-Mockery” is a story very close to the facts of Hirabayashi’s earlier life with men. The protagonist, Yoshiko, is a leftist, who lives with her lover, Koyama, who is also a leftist. The couple is very poor, and often do not have enough money to buy food. Therefore, Koyama sends Yoshiko out to have sex with a man, Yada, who believes himself to be leftist, although Yoshiko herself finds him to be bourgeois. Yada receives money from his family every month, and therefore is one of the richer men in the couple’s circle of friends. The story describes the tumultuous relationship between Yoshiko, Koyama, and Yada, and how Yoshiko both fights against and falls victim to the desires, wishes, and longings of the men around her.

In many ways, this story is very similar to Hirabayashi’s own tale, and allows the author to describe the pain and suffering this type of relationship with men had on her.

Yoshiko describes how:

The woman who sells herself in order to save her life with her husband has been approved of in any era. In this time too her sacrifice has been praised as a sign of womanly virtue, but in my case, I couldn’t forgive Koyama of my sacrifice. I didn’t hold such a need for Koyama. In the past, I have known three men and have thrown each of them away without much agony.

Koyama, who had abandoned the communist group after two jail imprisonments,⁶ was a man who has written a large number of unsolicited

⁶ It is interesting to note here that Yoshiko becomes the stronger socialist/communist in this story, as will be shown later in her encounter with the AA Corporation receptionist (see below). Hirabayashi has

manuscripts over these four years. He sends off manuscripts tirelessly, but strangely, they return one after another as if they had rubber bands attached.

He is a wretched man who must disguise his real reason for living with me: to make me work (44).

Yoshiko's relationship with Koyama is parasitic, with Koyama only feeding off of her for money, and is doing so in a way that is particularly revolting: prostitution.

Yoshiko notes that Koyama keeps saying that 'this time' is the 'last time,' but notes that "those 'just this time' have inexorably continued (44). The couple's relationship could hardly be worse.

However, this story, with its elements that show strong resemblance to Hirabayashi's own life, also provides the author with a means of giving those events meaning. One of the most obvious ways of doing this is through internal monologue. This internal monologue and description allows the protagonist to analyze the situation she finds herself in. Yoshiko notes that Koyama distains her and that he thinks that "I hold blemishes in my past, so I have to please Koyama in every way" (45). While this self awareness about Koyama's feelings about her may not actually change the situation, it does seem to provide Yoshiko some sense of calm about the situation, and if not change at that moment, perhaps the beginning of change. Her self-awareness continues as she debates whether or not to ask Yada for money. Yoshiko thinks:

I couldn't bear that I was trying so hard for so little money...for that kind of man, doing that kind of thing. I thought how it was debasing. A

reversed traditional gender roles here where the man is more ideological than the woman. Yoshiko herself makes note of this saying in reference to how unusually it is the woman who does not understand her husband's communist position, saying "Our relationship was reversed. I once felt the need to call him a loafer in order to humiliate him" (45).

previously unseen world suddenly opened up before my eyes. I was able to believe that there was hope for my life.

With that I became like the Yoshiko of the past, and decided to return home without asking Yada for money (47).

While ultimately Yoshiko does receive money from Yada, her self-awareness of the situation presents the possibility for future change, a change that ultimately Hirabayashi herself was able to effect by selling her writings.

Furthermore, Yoshiko shows her own internal strength in several other places in the short story. In the story's opening scene, Yoshiko shows how she is not just the average woman, content to let men stare at her as they wish. In this sexually-charged part of the story, the protagonist meets a man in the streetcar, "the kind of man who, of course, classifies women by their appearance, and seems to like golf and parties at the Imperial Hotel" (42). Seeing the man's obvious derision for her and her clothing, she decides to position herself so that she collides with him when the streetcar moves:

When the streetcar jerks again, I stumble close to him and put my hand on his thigh. The man, with hate showing on his pale face, looks at me, stands and walks towards the exit. I sat down in his seat. It was like something refreshing descended down into my chest (42).

In a sense, this scene shows a reverse of the typical situation where a man would molest a woman on the train or streetcar. Certainly a depiction of less assertive woman than this was the norm in 1927 Japan; the protagonist is able to change a situation that she is uncomfortable with, and in a sense, 'get back' at the man for his unflattering gaze. Yoshiko "in effect reverses the man's objectifying and dehumanizing gaze and transforms herself from gazed upon object into gazing subject (Flores 21). Whether or

not this act is admirable is not the question in this case; what is worthy of consideration is only that Hirabayashi has created a character who can effect change in a difficult situation, even if she cannot change the negative situation with her lovers.

Another example where Yoshiko is able to prove herself a strong woman able to change her situation is when she goes to get money from the AA Corporation, which “sets aside a special day for anarchists and revolutionaries to come and get a handout” (54). Yoshiko, Yada, and some of Yada’s friends all make their way to receive money. The man in front of Yoshiko is able to demand double the amount of money from the AA receptionist. Yoshiko, therefore demands the same payment. The scene is as follows:

“Ogawa.”

This is my pseudonym. The men in the place looked at me, as it was rare to see a woman in such a place.

“Make it ten yen please.”

“What a bother. It’s five yen today.”

“Then, why did you just give ten yen to that man over there?”

Someone heckles words of support.

“It’s not your money, right?” I said, getting caught up in the moment.

“Isn’t this money taken from working people? You tell them not to be stingy.”

“It can’t be helped, right?”

I receive a receipt for ten yen.

“She’s not a beauty, but that’s impressive,” I heard a man with a Chinese fan says as he smiled.

When I came out of the room with my ten yen, I saw one of Yada’s friends, Kigawa, who gave a cold smile.

Yada and his companions all received only five yen. Kigawa couldn’t say anything in front of the receptionist.

Hearing, “It’s five yen,” he bowed his head respectably and nodded.

Yada says, “Women have an advantage after all,” having been impressed with my success. Kigawa responds with the same cold smile, and I feel even more rebellious than before (55).

Yoshiko demonstrates her fortitude and rebellious nature, doing what none of her companions manage to do: get more money. Once again, Hirabayashi inverts the

stereotypical relationship between men and women, making her female protagonist the provider in the relationship. Furthermore, Yoshiko shows herself as unusual, being in a place where no one expects to see a female, and in the end, the other people (like the man holding the Chinese fan) approve of her strength. Even the disparaging Kigawa (like the rude looks from the subway man) does not totally crush her spirit. While in a difficult situation with her lovers, the protagonist still shows her strong and rebellious nature. While this may be a small victory, it is a victory nonetheless, and allows Hirabayashi a way to ‘change’ the circumstances of her own past, even if these changes are perhaps small and subtle.

In “In a Charity Ward” and “Evening Wind,” the issue of men is peripheral but important, while in “Self-Mockery” the issue of childbirth is peripheral but certainly poignant. Once again showing how much of an important event the loss of Hirabayashi’s child was, this story too provides room for personal growth for the author. On the one hand, Hirabayashi includes in this story a direct reference to the experiences she had in Manchuria. The protagonist Yoshiko tells an all too familiar story, saying, “I once gave birth to a child by my first love. The child was born on a rusty bed in a dismal charity hospital room in Manchuria, where I and my love had been sent. She died, on that thin futon, just like that she had disappeared, while I couldn’t stand, due to post-delivery beriberi....The child’s father was taken to prison” (45). This story is, once again, almost an exact retelling of Mitsuyo’s story in “In a Charity Ward” and Hirabayashi’s own tale. What is different in “Self-Mockery” is that here Hirabayashi is able to explore the consequences of labor on a female body. Before Yoshiko gets on the streetcar, she thinks about her body:

Unable to stand it, I opened my kimono to look at my breast. Like a balloon that had lost its air, my breast hung there loosely. Like an old scar tells of old pain, my breast showed that in the past I had nursed.

I hated looked at my breast. In looking at it, I couldn't help see in the sagging skin the image of my ugly self.

There was nothing wrong with my breast. I closed my kimono and continue walking, and again feel the self-disgust whirl up inside me (40).

Yoshiko's disgust at her own body after childbirth is momentarily relieved when she 'molests' the man with the insulting gaze in the streetcar. Hirabayashi shows a woman is able to, at least temporarily, change her feelings about herself, and convert her situation into a better one. The negative views of her body as a result of childbirth, are still means of transformation.

Furthermore, this story also provides a 'new' pregnancy. The protagonist finds that her period is late and is dismayed to discover that she may be pregnant. She thinks, "Pregnant? The feelings in my body felt like those I had experienced when I was pregnant before. A child appearing now? That kind of thing could only be thought of as comic, incongruous, and impossible" (58). Faced with her own poverty and the situation with Koyama, Yoshiko's situation seems desperate, hardly the perfect 'family' for a child to be born. Yoshiko notes that, "That time of the month, the strangeness of my body still hadn't come and the end of the month approached. I didn't even see one yen that month. I had lost the will to even read the society newspaper. During that time, I felt the imagined lump in my lower belly growing bigger" (58). The situation continues with Koyama completely clueless, as most of the male partners are in Hirabayashi's stories, as to Yoshiko's pregnancy. However, in Hirabayashi's early works that deal with pregnancy, there is almost never a happy end to a pregnancy. Here, Yoshiko does not

choose to end the pregnancy, but loses the child naturally through a miscarriage.

Koyama becomes preoccupied with the concept of selling mourning beads for the loss of a loved one. Hirabayashi writes:

When I saw that Koyama knew nothing about the pregnancy, I turned away, all the while feeling my own face grow pale. I then feel a strange sensation in my body. When I went to the bathroom, I saw a dark stream of something flow out of me like a lake. Koyama spends the day repeating his praise of the thought of selling mourning beads as the 'feeling of the dark loneliness of life.' I feel strangely ticklish and like I'm going to suffocate. At night, as I unrolled my futon, I felt more composed.

"I sold mourning beads," I say into my mouth so that Koyama can't hear. When I hear Koyama's heavy breathing, I am hit by an inexpressible despair. I wriggled my body and cried. My inconsolable tears flowed down on the pattern of the futon (58-9).

This passage is striking, for it shows a passionate despair not seen in the other depictions of the loss of a child. In "In the Charity Ward" Mitsuyo passes beyond despair, into a place where she no longer feels anything. In "Evening Wind," Osen is almost driven mad by her killing of the child. However, here, for the first time, the reader can see overt signs of the protagonist's despair. "Self-Mockery" provides a unique opportunity for Hirabayashi to explore a despair that she perhaps was not able to experience when she was in the difficult situation in Manchuria. Perhaps it is only after some time has passed that Hirabayashi felt comfortable exploring what losing a child really meant emotionally. "Self-Mockery" allows the protagonist, and perhaps even Hirabayashi, to experience an emotional catharsis. "Self-Mockery" also provides room for change, and self-awareness, of the protagonist, and for Hirabayashi.

“Self-mockery,” like “In the Charity Ward” and “Evening Wind,” seems to take elements of Hirabayashi’s own life, while adding fictionalized elements, elements that give the protagonist opportunities for moments of clarity, reflection, and self-awareness. These stories, through the fictionalized elements, provide Hirabayashi a means to ‘change’ actual events in her life, and perhaps provide her with some sense of closure. While no amount of fictionalized writing could change the fact that her child died in Manchuria, on the subject of men, perhaps Hirabayashi’s own writings did provide her with a vehicle for change. It is worth noting that Hirabayashi did, as her protagonist thinks about doing, leave the lovers that treated her cruelly and forced her into prostitution. She was stronger than they in terms of her writing, and shortly after her time with Iida Tokutarō, was able to publish her writing more extensively with the help and female support of another female author, Hayashi Fumiko. Perhaps writing about her love affair in “Self-Mockery” brought some sense of clarity to the author herself. While a reader will never know the true thoughts and feelings of Hirabayashi Taiko, it is evident through her writings that certain events and situations had an effect on her and inspired her to record those events in her fictionalized, autobiographical works in a way that transforms them into self-reflective pieces which showcase strong women who make decisions on the basis of their beliefs, beliefs that are often stronger than those of the men surrounding the women. Hirabayashi Taiko was clearly very similar to her protagonists.

Hirabayashi is unusual and special for her time in her ability as a writer to transform her experiences as a woman, often mistreated, sometimes with tragic results. While still not losing the raw power of those events, she makes them into something more. Flores writes, “Strategically shocking, particularly for their time, Hirabayashi’s

works refuse to conform to conventional notions of literature” (32). Hirabayashi’s early short stories show a reader just how traumatic an experience might have been for her. They “disturb us in significant ways, provoking a reconsideration of the status of the maternal body in her works. Vivid and disturbing imagery of prisons and hospitals haunt readers for their rawness, their reluctance to be sanitized or to be tamed” (Flores 32). Her works show possible reasons why an author and perhaps why especially a female author might choose autobiographical fiction instead of autobiography when writing about her life. John Lewell writes about Hirabayashi’s works, “For documentary realism, scarcely anyone can match Taiko’s uncanny, pictorial intensity” (113). Certainly, Hirabayashi’s striking and often grotesque detail might be off putting to some readers. However, in her striking detail Hirabayashi is able to describe events in a remarkable manner.

Hirabayashi’s fiction seems to allow her some freedom in choosing to ‘rewrite’ her own history and in doing so, she makes that history and herself stronger in the telling, and therefore shows that she is actually a very strong woman, even when the circumstances might dictate otherwise.

Chapter 5: In the Charity Ward

“For documentary realism, scarcely anyone can match Taiko’s uncanny, pictorial intensity” (Lewell 113).

Hirabayashi’ Taiko’s previously un-translated work “Seryōshitsu ni te” or “In the Charity Ward (1927), provides the best example of Hirabayashi’s autobiographical fiction and Lewell’s ‘uncanny pictorial intensity.’

In the Charity Ward (1927)

By Hirabayashi Taiko

When I returned to the hospital from interrogation by the secret military police, it was already evening. A horse-drawn taxi without a fare, the horse’s reins slack, clattered up the paved street leading to the plaza.

“No large bills,” the annoyed rickshaw man declared in Chinese. He smoothed the crumpled blue Korean currency I had handed him and returned it to me.

At a small shop run by a Chinese in front of the gate, I bought two packs of toilet paper for the next day and received four small silver coins in change. When I handed over a silver 10 sen coin, the rickshaw man said “*Xie, Xie.*” The boy who accompanied him, pushing his bicycle in front, blew on his trumpet and they both trotted off.

I bowed to the old lady at the front desk, who leaned out under the electric light to look me over. I took off my cold straw sandals, which were slippery with my oily sweat, and put on another pair. My chubby thighs felt flaccid and heavy.

In irritation, pulling up the stray strands of hair that had come loose, I was overcome by a terrible depression that seemed to assault the front of my brain.

When I reached the top of the stairs from the charity ward, which was in a half basement, I thought I felt a dull throbbing and then my right leg cramped. Why I don't know, but it was as if my legs were suddenly swept out from under me, and I fell face down on the cold concrete floor. When I thrust out my arms to try to stand up, my knees were wobbly like creaky metal hinges. My arms attempting to support my body with my large pregnant belly began shaking uncontrollably. Shivers ran up from my four limbs to my whole body.

When I fell, I had flung the bundle of toilet paper about three feet ahead onto the dark floor and it seemed to float white, forming a rectangle in the air. I put my ear near the floor and waited for someone to come, but the hallway towards the half cellar was as quiet and dark as a tunnel. Listening carefully, I could the sound of the buzzing of mosquitoes from the dusty hallway floor. The sound wafted over on a strange smelling gust of air that blew past my cheek.

I felt as pitiful as a mosquito unable to stand with its heavy belly swollen with blood, or like a waterlogged tree dragged out of the river. With my right hand I touched my left hand which was as weak as stalks of new annual grasses, but the pads of my five fingers were numb like I was touching crinkled crepe silk.

It's beriberi. I'd heard of pregnant women developing these symptoms of beriberi. From the constant red dust in the air of this colonized land and from the poor nutrition of a daily diet of eight parts water, two parts Nanking rice, I had developed beriberi.

Beriberi on top of everything else!

In the darkness, I felt my own blank facial expression.

However, if beriberi was involved on top of childbirth, my scheduled imprisonment might be postponed a little. Something like a trace of happiness dimly raced through my blank brain. I was afraid of prison. When I imagined a woman holding her infant in prison, my internal organs seemed to shrink. The first time I realized I was bearing this child in my belly, I'd been thrown into prison in the midst of the chaos of the Great Tokyo Earthquake. Perhaps my child's life was preordained by me to be spent in prison. But even so, I wanted to give birth to a girl with a wide forehead and slightly droopy eyes. I'll raise her in prison as a Japanese Bolshevik!

Finally, resisting the fetal movements that pressed against my chest, I whistled with my thick lips. The sound was hoarse, like the last bit of steam released by a steam engine, and it echoed crookedly down the dark hallway.

We had planned to blow up the rails at the construction site where they were laying track for a horse-drawn rail system, but it had gone wrong. It still echoed in my ears, the thunderous crash as the truck plunged into the sea. It had all come to nothing.

Because of the terrorism that my husband and the three coolie supervisors had planned, the four of them were thrown into prison, and the strike was thoroughly defeated. The solidarity of the coolies dissolved, and they were fired with less compensation than they'd been offered before the strike. The abject coolies, carrying their thin futons and dust covered cloth shoes, had no choice but to respond to the military recruitment of the warlord Chang Tso-lin. Like so much discounted freight

carried on the Southern Manchurian Railroad, they jostled their way onto the train and left.

Afterwards, those who remained were the four imprisoned comrades and, with my husband's imprisonment, myself. I received the status of an "ill traveler without support" and as such was given permission to enter the charity hospital to give birth. I was employed as a maid in the Batetsu Company that had the contract for constructing the horse-drawn rail system, and so I was convicted as a co-conspirator. It was determined that after I gave birth, I would begin to serve my sentence in prison. There was a police guard posted outside my room at the charity hospital. He had long hair and was always grasping a dirty towel that he used to wipe his sweaty neck.

I thought that I shouldn't hate my husband. I knew from the beginning that an act of terror of that sort would end up like this. My husband and his three comrades laughed at my misgivings as the vacillating cowardice of a pregnant woman, but the result was as I had expected. However, if the direction of the general situation demands that one must take decisive action, no matter what the consequences, to arrive at the ultimate goal, then one had no choice but to follow the general situation. This was the path of the political activist. It was the path of a wife in relation to her husband. I had no regrets.

I heard footsteps approaching. The squeaky sound of new shoes came close to the window. A thin blue alpaca sweater appeared against the background of a white sheet drying outside in the sun. I positioned myself to look like I had just fallen down. It was the old receptionist.

"Excuse me. Could you help me?"

"What are you doing sitting there?"

The wrinkles around the old receptionist's eyes deepened as he focused and leaned over to get a better look.

“Kitamura isn't it? What a bother.”

The old receptionist, upon realizing I was from the charity ward, displayed a noticeable lack of respect both in his language and his attitude. With his back to me, he held out his arm without any particular kindness.

Leaning on the frail old man, I made my heavy body descend the stairs to the basement.

Being called for interrogation by the military police had at least made it possible for me to breathe the fresh air outside for a day. Now the smell assaulted me as I entered the ward, the smell of disinfectant from the lavatory mixed with the dampness of the concrete floor of the half basement designed to let neither the dampness nor the smell escape.

An old woman stricken with paralysis was curled up like a squid on her bed. Only her white eyes with a splash of pale blue moved, staring at me. I stared back at her.

From the north corner of the room, I heard the sound of Buddhist chanting, as quiet as foam bursting. This was from an old woman, who had also been sent from an old folk's home in Port Arthur. One of her arms was like a stiff withered branch. When I heard her chanting, I, who was not sick, felt that I couldn't bear the smell from the lavatory.

The police guard assigned to me was asleep sideways on my bed. His story book of chivalrous adventure had been left on my pillow. He wore a white uniform and his arm bent over his chest revealed it had shrunk in the wash.

Syrupy drool dripped from the corner of his half-open mouth, down his moustache, and onto my bedding, leaving a worm-like wet spot.

I grabbed his white uniform at the gold button on his chest and shook him.

“Ah, I fell asleep. Did you just get back? I was worried because you were late.”

Not replying, I took the hand towel hanging by the side of my pillow and wiped up his saliva.

“What happened?”

“Nothing happened.”

I had taken off my belt and left it stretched out from my bed onto the floor. Then I flopped down on the bed. I turned from one side to the other, the bed creaking as I did so.

“I’ll be off then. See you later.”

“Goodbye.”

A prostitute who had attempted suicide, probably unable to sleep, raised her head to watch the police guard leave, to see off the jailer as she pushed open the door. The long shadow of the uniformed guard swayed along the hallway wall.

My legs were hot. The muscles of my legs carried a leaden heaviness up to my lap. Despair cut through my heart like a saw. In the twenty two years of my life, was this the fruit of my labor, the accumulation of my hopes? Water leaking from the roof had tinted the wallpaper in various greys, creating a map of strange and exotic countries.

As the night deepened, the wind that blew over the field of acacia saplings hit the pharmacy storehouse and threw sand against the glass windowpanes of the charity ward. Only the rattling of the windowpanes interrupted the sound of the wind.

I rested my left leg heavily on top of my right and thought of my husband as I stared up at the long electric light cord.

He's not my husband. He's my comrade. It's because I think of him as my husband that I feel dissatisfaction about so many things. For a man and a woman who were comrades in the face of a coming revolution, trying to cling to that unreliable rope of the old Japanese family system was like clinging to last year's withered grasses. As I thought this, however, a pair of round, black-framed spectacles seemed to stare down at me, as if to suck me, who was of such short stature, up into them.

"Mitsuyo, forgive me. I'm most sorry to you and the child. I'm sorry" he said with down-turned glasses and one lonely tear fell on his glasses and was magnified. This was the scene when I met with my husband, who was chained that afternoon in the hallway of the military police. I somehow felt the urge to cover his face.

What made him feel that thread of lingering affection towards us to collapse, so thoroughly, and act like a woman? Just what were his bloodshot eyes asking me to do for him?

A wife's existence is bound to a weak-willed husband through lingering affection. A wife cannot help but catch the end of the long belt that her husband throws to her. It's disgusting. Disgusting! It's a feeling like I'm falling into nothing. I wanted those unbearable feelings to collapse like a crumbling mosaic.

My dearest comrade! Pay no attention to your surroundings. Look forward. Look forward. I tried calling out to his shadowy image that had formed on the ceiling.

In a breathless whisper, I sang "The Flag of the People." When I came to the high part, I pushed back my shoulders and pushed the air out of my lungs, but I heard

quivering of my own voice. One single tear flowed out of the corner of my eye and into my ear. It tickled.

Just how many hours did I sleep? The coughing of a neighboring asthmatic startled me, and I woke up. The window was gently rattling.

When I moved my back to change the position of my legs, a scary pain crawled up to my lower belly like a vine.

Some kind of contracting pain continued, pressing on me. To bear the pain, I bent my back and put my both hands on my lower stomach. With my numb hand, I felt the tight skin and gentle swelling of my belly. I stroked it intently.

An irresistible sleepiness overcame my eyelids. Then, like a scream, the pain in my belly swept over me. It hurts. I can't stand the pain.

I instinctively sat up, grabbed the back of my fat knees, and pressed them against my belly. A certain familiar warmth that I didn't know I possessed in my body was transmitted to my lower belly. But there was a pain that couldn't be suppressed by this posture. I kicked out my legs, and feeling the stiff pillow on my back, I grabbed the bedstand's rough metal pole. As the pain faded like the outgoing tide, the coolness of the rusty pole felt pleasant to my sweaty, oily hand.

I gripped the pole to draw myself up and while holding my breath and bore down with all my strength.

“Ah, ah, ah, ah.”

I scrunched up my face and exerted a lot of force on my stomach. My eyes closed, I perceived a variety of images appearing and disappearing in the darkness. I

heard the terrible sound of a truck falling into the ocean. Dust that one would want to avert one's gaze from danced up like smoke.

When I opened my eyes, a sandstorm was rattling off the window, which was shaking. The electric light's cord hanging down from the ceiling was gently swaying. The weak sound of sleepers' breathing and my suppressed groans contrasted with each other.

I was cruelly absorbed in listening to the sound of my own voice, which was that of a gruesome beast.

Separated from my beloved husband, unseen by anyone, forced to give birth in this colony's charity ward like a stray dog; I couldn't help but lament my terrible, unhappy fate.

I had lived up until this point protecting the one lonely candle within myself that even if it burned out I would light it again. I live believing in the future. Now, even within this agony, I feel this burning light, a light that would guide me through this agony. No matter what happens, I will protect that light and fight. My salty tears streamed ceaselessly down my distorted face.

At five o'clock in the morning, the head nurse, who had come down from the second floor to the toilet, discovered me in labor and on top of a single old, stained futon I bore a baby girl as red as a monkey. Her closed eyes formed tiny threads that curved upward. After five minutes passed, her silk-like hair hung down on her forehead making her face look long.

Outside the window, daybreak shone blue on the glass. I had placed the infant on the futon I had received from the nursery, a futon of hemp with a flowery pattern made

stiff with dried breast milk. I placed a blanket over the baby, but she kept kicking and kicking it aside with her red legs. She would not stop crying, as if a fire had been lit under her.

Day light thrust in from the window. The nurse's now visible bleached stark white uniform afflicted my exhausted nerves. I did as the confident-seeming head nurse said and stood, planted my feet, and closed my eyes. My thighs were languid, like they were going to melt.

I rubbed the soles of my feet, but because the base of my arm hurt, I had to shrug my shoulders. I felt like I was touching something strange and smooth from far away. My hands and feet both were totally numb, like a soft squishy rice cake.

The feeling of the head nurse's nickel pinchers on my inner thigh felt like something I could almost remember, but could still not quite recall. It was frustrating.

“Head Nurse. It seems I have a bad case of beriberi. I'm this numb...”

I pleaded for sympathy and showed her the skin of my leg as I touched it.

“Beriberi? You're fine.”

The head nurse, with eyes that drooped down at the corners, was unmoved and flung the sanitary cotton soaked with yellow discharge into a plate.

“However...well look. When I press here, the skin doesn't come back”

The spot on my thigh that I had pressed with my finger formed a concave, depression like a dimple, and the flesh did not spring back. This surprised even myself and when I only pushed the same place again, a large dent was formed, like my finger had fallen in.

“That's troublesome, isn't it.”

After the head nurse, doubting me, tried pushing the skin, shrimp-like wrinkles gathered on her forehead, and she shook her head with its straggling hairs.

I turned to look out the window and considered the head nurse's feelings.

Gestational beriberi is illness in this hospital that gave people the most problems. Gestational beriberi in this colony is an illness which, if it got a little serious, the patient would be unable to stand for three to five years. The patient couldn't even use the toilet. The Director of the hospital was the one most inconvenienced when a person who couldn't walk was brought into the hospital. He desired to put to his own private uses the support the charity ward received from the city, and to this end he employed as few people as possible. Leaving the same patient in the charity ward for three to five years was not the way to post administrative achievement. In his report to the rich families that donated to the charity ward, the Director had to state, "The charity ward treated this many thousand, this many hundreds, this many tens of individual patients." Having the capacity for a fewer number of individual patients was clearly not a good policy.

The head nurse was the Director's wife and a Christian. On the surface she was the head of nursing. In reality she didn't have a medical license, but she still did medical examinations and made housecalls. On the outside she was as soft as velvet, but beneath the surface her responses to people were often hard and thorny.

The head nurse finished her ministrations to me and covered my legs with my robe, which had gathered up around my waist. She turned toward the child's bassinet and drew it next to me, its wheels screeching. I gazed at the baby girl. Her droopy eyes were weakly shut as if she couldn't stand the brightness of the room.

I was struck by a sense of inexplicable strangeness, but there was no feeling of the scariest emotion of all: 'love.' The head nurse gently covered the baby with a light cotton futon and when she tapped on the bottom of her feet, the child moved slightly and gently breathed in her sleep, like the nurse's touch tickled.

Something clear and cheerful spread in my heart. It was the feeling of coming out of a dark tunnel. It was the feeling of a fresh morning. I would throw off my old self, the self that was cringing in sticky, oily despair. I pray that this resolution is not of the fragile sort that will dry up today or tomorrow.

The morning meal was the same as yesterday. We were served a white *miso* soup in which blanched vegetables had been boiled but the scum not removed, resulting in the harsh taste of lye. In addition, there was a small dish of reduced kelp boiled down in soy sauce. It tasted like one was munching on salt. The meal was capped off by two halves of pickled *daikon* radish, *takuan*, cut into half moon shapes.

I dumped the reduced kelp into the rice gruel and poured it into my mouth while still lying on my side.

"Today Shanghai vegetables. Tomorrow Shanghai vegetables. Are they trying to dessicate us and kill us?"

The old woman paralytic, sitting properly on the middle of her futon, said this in a crazy Kyūshū dialect and spit out on the floor the green thing she had been chewing on, out onto the floor. All of us laughed inanely with food still stuffed in our mouths.

"Hey, Grandma. If you don't like your *miso* soup, trade me for my *daikon* radish."

The prostitute got off her bed and, dragging her straw sandals with their purple rubber soles as she walked, she shuffled over to the old lady.

“Hey, this is a conversation about trying to kill Komiya. Unforgivable. Unforgivable.”

Suddenly, in front of the prostitute, a forty year old woman, the victim of paranoid delusions, waved about black chopsticks in a threatening manner. Komiya was her husband, who had died ten years earlier. This was an everyday occurrence, so no one laughed.

I put down my chopsticks, leaving quite a bit of rice gruel and sea kelp uneaten.

This was because it suddenly occurred to me to write a letter to my husband. The prostitute, who had experienced miscarriage, had told me several times that I shouldn't read or write for a time after giving birth. Thinking that if she saw me, things might get annoying, I propped up a magazine against the pillow stand to shield me from her view, and I took out the fine stationery I had filched from the Batetsu Company. He had enough troubles, and so I started writing things that would cheer him up, but as I proceeded, I became more and more strangely upset.

“...My legs have stopped working. I am not even free to manipulate the bedpan by myself. I become depressed when I see the look of disgust on the nurse's face after I've asked her to clean the bedpan. But more than that, what's really hard is that there is no one to clean the baby's diaper. Because it can't be helped, I've bartered a deal with the second floor maid to clean one diaper for two *sen*, but I have only two yen and seventy or eighty *sen* left in my wallet. I don't know how things will turn out.”

I intended not to write this, not to write that, but carried away by my emotions, I ended up putting down these complaints. I felt contempt for myself. I sat up suddenly to seal the envelope and was overcome by dizziness. Lying back down and closing my

eyes, I heard an awful sound, as if I were falling into the depths of the ocean. This is cerebral anemia, I thought, and focused on the white Japanese hand towels that hung in the window, waving in the breeze. Then I lost consciousness.

...

I suddenly regained consciousness. My left arm hurt. When I rolled up my sleeves, I discovered diamond-shaped adhesive plaster on both of my arms. I drifted off and awoke to find the police guard was gripping my wrist with his lukewarm clammy hand. I soon realized that he was checking my pulse, but at first I was not able to restrain my feelings of nausea and antipathy and light surprise. Looking up at his chin covered in whiskers, I used my strength to brush his hand off my wrist.

“Give Kitamura Mitsuyo a shot. 8:30 a.m.”

“Understood.”

The young women’s voices resounded like a bell through the dark air filled with the hum of flies. With a loud snap, indicating a strong spring, the nurse closed the cover to the box of the injection syringes.

On the nurse’s duty table was the enema syringe to be used for insertion into the anuses of the paralytic patients. It was round and thick like a large candle..

“Hey, day nurse. Can I ask for an enema today? Well, I’m happy. I haven’t gone for five days now. My bowels have been full since June.”

Picking up on the old paralytic’s words, the delusional woman kept shouting, for no apparent reason, “I’m happy, I’m happy” in a sing-song voice..

“Auntie! If you keep yelling like that, they’ll take you to the dying room.”

When the prostitute joked like this to the deluded woman, the two paralytics made faces and shut up. These two believed the newspaper article about the Director that difficult to treat sick people who'd been here a long time were carried off to the dying room, locked inside still alive, and left to die. Anyone who had been in the charity ward for three months personally knew of a patient who had met her end in the dying room. The dying room was in a building in the corner of the garden. The building was large and made of stone. A large acacia tree with delicate leaves arched over it. In front of the building was a river of straw sandals where people had left them before they entered, sandals now growing green with mold. The faucet over the artificial stone table used for autopsies leaked and was constantly running. The buttocks, the arms, the head, the shoulders, the shape of these body parts were engraved in the man-made stone, which was the size of a straw tatami mat. Because of the constant falling water, the seams between the imitation granite slabs were rusted, making it seem as though the engraved human body was sliced up. One could almost smell a human cadaver being dissected on the table. For people defeated in the long battle of life and dragged down to this basement by the chain of events of life, the long duration spent in the charity ward before death was not as difficult to bear as the realization just before death that one would be placed on the dissection table. Placed on that cold stone table, having one's body dismembered in compensation for a hospital bill one couldn't pay—knowing this end, how could one possibly believe in the peaceful ascension to heaven described in the framed picture that hung above the table.

“Hey, hey. Don't tell ugly jokes. Everybody's getting depressed,” the prostitute said of her own remarks in order to avoid criticism from the others, and she tucked her

neck down, shrugged her shoulders like a turtle, and stuck out her tongue. To mollify the difficult paralytics, she brought out her cards and began telling the fortunes of the two women.

“Heart, huh? Good, Good. My gracious! It’s a diamond. And it’s another diamond, huh. Future happiness isn’t looking so good now.”

Listening to the hysterical voice of the prostitute, I turned my attention to the baby and dozed off.

In the afternoon, my breasts began to hurt as if two weights had been suspended from my shoulders. I pulled in my chin and looked down at my unsightly breasts. They were darkened and as swollen and heavy as winter melons.

Milk. The problem of milk. I had seen the following cases. In a humid, airless brick factory I had worked alongside mothers who had contracted beriberi and who were operating the printing machines. Their eyelids swollen, they fed their children their breast milk. It was a rainy late autumn. The children got diarrhea, grew thin from continued lack of nutrition, and when they let go of the breast, they simply cried. Sick children couldn’t be looked after at the day nursery. The women came to work bearing their children on their backs. They bribed the cleaners with a little money and used the storage room, where they put their children on bedding in a row. It was enough to make one weep. The factory was hit by hard times and was shutdown. I heard that many of the children who nursed on the milk of their sick mothers had died. It seems that my beriberi might also have had its origin in my working at that factory.

Be that as it may, at the very least, in these circumstances, I could only depend on my own knowledge.

I squeezed my nipple. Several arcs of breast milk flew out and landed on the pillow cover. Coming up with an idea, I washed my finger in the bedside cup and pressed it to the child's peach lips. The lips were hot and round like a wheel, and she sucked on my finger. When I took away my finger, she began to cry like she was going into convulsions.

Twilight. Cicadas settled on the wooden fence outside the pharmaceutical warehouse, which was rare. The cries of the cicadas were loud, like boiling oil. The thin acacia leaves outside the window took in the soft slanting light of the sunset and were swaying in the breeze. The long, plaintive traces of the trumpets of the rickshaw boys could be heard in the distance.

"Time to take temperatures," the nurse, swinging her silver watch, got up from the nurse's station and signaled to the men's ward. Her loud, deep voice echoed down the narrow hallway.

I listlessly looked up at the grandfather clock and stuck the cold thermometer under my armpit. Milk. If they'd only give me a half a pint of milk a day, this problem would be solved. I couldn't feed my child the milk from my beriberi infected breast. My chest hurt like it was tied tight with string, and when I touched it, breast milk leaked through my thin, faded robe. The child was crying while her head followed the upper part of my *kimono*, which had touched her chin. She was searching for my breast.

I held the thermometer up to the window. The mercury had risen to 101.5, about three degrees above normal. I lightly pressed my hand against my forehead.

"Time for rounds. They're making rounds."

A young nurse, her white hat fluttering on her head, came in and began carrying the tin chamber pots out to the hallway. The nurse picked up the chamber pot of the old woman who was curled up like a squid. When she removed the lid, a swarm of flies buzzed up.

The Director and his wife, the Head Nurse entered from the west entrance. Head Nurse held her stethoscope with its gum tubes in her hand. The director followed, with his heavily veined hands clasped at his back, resting on his trousered buttocks. I could see through his weak glasses that his heavily lidded eyes were bloodshot with a boredom he couldn't conceal. Or, perhaps he'd drunk too much *sake* the night before.

"Dear Lord, we thank you most gratefully that you have again given us this time today with these unfortunate sick people." The prostitute said "Amen" in a nasally voice in reply to the Head Nurse's prayer. I had been considering how I might talk to the Director about obtaining dairy milk, and I was irritated by the nasally sound of the prostitute's voice which distracted these thoughts. I rolled over on my back and closed my eyes, but I remained alert, my body tense, like a nervous cat.

I heard the ticking of the Head Nurse's wristwatch approach, so I opened my eyes suddenly, pretending to awake from a long sleep.

"She looks so peaceful and pretty while sleeping."

After the Head Nurse removed the gauze protecting the child from flies, the Director came over.

"Noda. What did you use this bottle for?"

The Director turned back to the nurse, who was turning over the pages of the patient registry, and pointed at a small bottle. I hadn't noticed, but there was a small bottle on my bedstand.

“Haah?”

She took the bottle, looking like she had no clue, raised the bottle up high, squinted her eyes and read the label.

“Ah, this is the medicine we used for this patient's morning injection.”

“Injection? Did you get permission from the Head Nurse for the injection?”

“No. But the patient fainted....and when there is fainting there tends to also be cerebral anemia, so we did not ask for permission.”

“You idiot!”

Suddenly the blue glass shattered into powder on the floor and flew in all directions. The cork rolled across the room..

“You've been working as a nurse for more than two years, so you should be able to read German, right?! Once someone's opened this bottle, the medicine can't be used again. Do you know how much one gram of this costs? There's no way this kind of medicine can be used for each and every cerebral anemia at this poor hospital.”

Hearing the Director's poor pronunciation of German, I chuckled to myself.

More than the price of a bottle of medicine, the life of one of your despised women patients...

The inescapable conclusion that I would have to feed my child my impure milk blew desolately through my heart like a cold wind.

Breast milk rushed out of my nipples with a frightening force and volume. The pain of swollen breasts had reached all the way to my shoulders this morning. It was the feeling of pus in part of my body. Three times during the night I had had the child suckle at my breasts, and the child's tongue and the sucking force of her throat pleasantly enticed milk from my breast.

The feeling of the child sucking was pleasant like I was bantering with my feelings of sleepiness. This was definitely the start of 'mother feelings.'

A frighteningly pleasant morning came. The numbness had traveled up to just below my breasts, and my body felt smooth like I was wearing a flesh shirt of habutae silk.

Dairy milk, dairy milk. I couldn't help but hear an inner voice that was as charming as a smoked herring, and it was easy enough for me to ignore it, to cut it off. Whether it was beriberi infected milk or pus, my beloved child was grunting with pleasure and drinking, wasn't she? My grandfather, who was a peasant, as well as my father, who was a craftsman, everyone worked their whole lives to feed their swarm of children. They wore themselves down and then died. The strong instinct to feed one's children was a tradition of poor people that pierced its way through us like a sewing needle.

I felt that I had become one dimensional, cut off from the past and future like a flat piece of paper. In any case, for a time we were mother and child. From here, the fact that I would go to prison stood like a wall between us. In prison, when the child matured a little, he or she was separated from the mother. I could not let the child experience the gloomy life of prison. Moreover, the authorities held that even if the mother sins, the

child is sinless. Thus, keeping the child in prison would be an illegal confinement and the child had to be expelled from prison. Just how, in this society of individualism, tearing a child from its mother constitutes freedom is a question. According to the law, for a mother in prison, all things, like a beloved child, should be lost, and the only meaning is in restriction. When I thought it through to this point, I discovered myself trapped by an inescapable nihilism that was out of my control.

The socialist me had withered with the prospect of my entering prison. It had surely withered. This pitiable self-consciousness drove me to despair.

You are a woman! Believe in the future. If you have a deep love for your child, it is precisely because of its depth that you must pledge to continue the struggle.

It was truly a fresh morning.

The coughing of a male tuberculosis patient came in on the wind together with torn shreds of a peach colored cherry blossom paper that a nurse had thrown away. They dropped about my bed, which was close to the window. The prostitute became hysterical, showed both of the soles of her pure white feet at the hem of the futon, and cried. Her long Japanese style hair had been crudely cut to an institutionalized page style, and the way it drifted around her long ears gave the impression of an innocence of one cruelly treated in life. She must have been a real beauty when she was young.

Just as I thought I had dozed off, I heard the sound of people running down the hallway, and I woke up. Several nurses ran past, their white uniforms fluttering.

I heard from somewhere, "He died!"

Died? I lifted my head, surprised even at my own surprise. A training nurse who had a dimple came running in like she was lost, and with her arm over her face cried out “Ohhh,” in an exclamation of shocked disgust.

“A patient in intensive care suffered from heart failure induced by beriberi. He could have died at any moment. But then all these flies gathered around him.”

The nurse’s hand, which displayed a red ruby ring, was at her face, like she was trying to cover her eyes.

“Flies?”

While remembering the cold, disgusting feeling of when a fly landed on me, I chased away the flies buzzing around the child’s face. She continued to sleep, her eyebrows twitching from time to time.

A little later, a rough stretcher made of canvas held between two bamboo poles came into the dark hallway with the green leaves outside as a backdrop. From beneath the dirty blanket, I could see one foot, which was swelled up like a melon.

The stretcher turned towards the wide garden and the dying room. From between the lattice of my bed, I could see a Chinese man carrying the stretcher. As he walked, his queue hairstyle bounced along his lower back. On the garden grounds where the Chinese man walked, yellow dandelions sprouted between rocks. It was already the middle of July.

The delusional woman, whom I saw in the dark corner of the room when I shifted my attention, was smiling as she moved her lips intoning a Buddhist chant.

“Namu Amida Butsu, Namu Amida Butsu.”

“Kitamura-san. The person just now was alive.”

“What?”

I, not understanding, asked in return.

“The person on the stretcher, you know? He was alive.”

“Impossible...”

“No, he was alive, he was alive!” she said with some enthusiasm. She pulled up her skirt, revealing red flannel underwear, and stuck out her leg, the unattractive flesh of her thigh sagging noticeably.

“When I looked at his leg from here, I could seeeee it! It was moving like this.”

“You’re saying something that’s a bad omen!” the paralytic woman suddenly declared and threw an apple skin of at the woman.

When the three o’clock rounds ended, a group of doctors with their white aprons wrapped severely around them, when towards the dying room, leaving trails of tobacco smoke in their wake. There were two professors and three medical students from Port Arthur Medical College. I had received medical examinations.

On days when there was to be an autopsy, everyone always looked gloomy and no one got up. I received a letter from my husband.

Just when I was wondering why the baby hadn’t come, I heard from the jailer that it was reported in the morning newspaper that you had given birth. Does the kid look like me? Are the toes normal?

“Are his toes normal?” In my heightened emotional state from the morning, this phrase couldn’t help but make me weep. The big toe on my husband, from the time of birth was as thin as a pinky. This letter spoke to me about my husband’s life in prison. I was angered that my incarcerated husband would first consider his wife on the outside

and his newborn child, but at the same time, I clung to that fact and this filled me with an unbearable sense of longing.

That night my child suffered from frightening diarrhea. Shit, watery with what looked like bluish-green grains mixed in, dirtied her diapers. Around dinner she threw up something black. I got up and checked her diaper. So I could check for a fever, I put my breast up by her mouth, but she turned away and shut her eyes. Refusing a breast put by her mouth, it seemed she was delirious with fever, just as I had feared. I tried to get her to drink some red grape colored medicine by pretending it was my breast, but a child who will not drink from a breast will not drink bitter medicine. After she threw up, her face was wrinkled around her mouth and her throat was swollen from having thrown up. I made a fuss requesting a medical examination. The nurse made an unpleasant face, like this was a bother, and took the diaper and the child up to the second floor. Throughout the night I listened for sounds from the second floor. The night wore on. Until around midnight, I heard a paying patient, who didn't sound ill, singing a popular song around the nurse's station. But as the night deepened, I didn't hear even the footsteps of the nurses making their regular rounds. The night ended with me waiting for the sound of a nurse's footsteps coming down from the second floor.

When morning came, a smiling nurse in training came to my bedside. In her smile, I knew what was coming.

“I'm so sorry for you. At just four o'clock your child passed away.”

“Oh, is that so.”

I tried to match my response to the nurse's quiet voice and her cheerful attitude, I answered as if I were unperturbed, as if nothing had happened. But in truth, I no longer felt anything.

“You probably want to see her one last time. But, you can't walk, so it's troublesome.”

“No, I won't see her.”

I said nothing more than this, no matter what the smiling nurse said. It was obvious how devoted these nurses, whose daily work was to joke and flirt with the male paying patients, had been to saving my child.

I imagined my small child, stomach distended from the beriberi milk, like pus, lying upstairs with eyes closed while the nurses were joking in the examination room. When I closed my eyes, it was like I was coming and going between dream and reality.

However, my feelings were dead. I just felt I could see a cloth-like a flag waving in the dark. I wondered if I was unhappy.

When they came to tell us that the body had been moved to the dying room, the prostitute, who could move about, said she would buy and burn incense there in my stead. I calmly agreed. Now when I sleep, instead of remembering my child's face, all I hear is the sound of the water from the faucet running over the autopsy table in the dying room. It was time for the autopsy to begin.

Because there was no money for artificial nutrition, the child was made to drink milk infected with beriberi milk and contracted infant beriberi and died. Most likely, this will be the result of the autopsy. This, in turn, will reinforce the medical community's conclusion: “It is dangerous to feed beriberi infected breast milk! When the mother has

beriberi, the infant should be fed by a wet-nurse or by artificial nutrition.” However, no conclusion on how to treat the sorts of people without the money for artificial nutrition will come from the autopsy of my poor child.

A few days later I received a phone call from the public prosecutor, and I completed the processing to enter prison. That night there was a rare downpour of rain on the colony. At the entrance of building, where the lights had been turned off at eight to save electricity, the swords at the police guards’ belts gleamed. I was helped into the rickshaw by a Chinese man. I was headed to a branch of Port Arthur Prison at Lijiatus. When we came to a hill in the suburbs, we faced gusts of wind racing down the slope, blowing in our eyes, and the rickshaw swayed perilously. With the swaying, the distant red lights appeared and disappeared through the celluloid window of the rickshaw. The lights marked the entrance to the prison.

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