

## Japanese literature-----A room of One's Own

The Room of Ms. Keiko Ochiai  
Visitor: Ms. Kiyomi Kawano

**Kiyomi(Ki):** Hello. The reason why I visit your room, Keiko-san, is to introduce you to the women of the world who should be interested in 'feminism-oriented' Japanese literature. Before getting into the novel, let's hear what Keiko has to say about her book as well as about herself. Shall we begin and go on by first-name bases, unusual for Japanese persons? (wink). O.K.?

**Keiko(ke):** Sure, with my pleasure(smile).

### 〈The Book〉

**Ki:** Let's talk about the book, *I don't Want to Play in Your Yard*. Now the book contains many feminism issues such as mother-daughter relationship, women's friendship, the issue of illegitimate child(yourself), the equality among women, and all different kinds of women's lives, which remain still now problematic. Did you have the intention as such at the beginning? And can I call this novel a fictionalized autobiography?

**Ke:** Yes, you can. Again, yes, of course I did have strong intention to include all feminism issues in my book, knowing many problems that women have been carrying on, Kiyomi-san. I can say, in other words, that I wrote about the subject matters that I myself would like to read and/or meet with.

**Ki:** Uh-huh. The title of the book was taken by children's song in US? I think the title is simple but sounds quite suggestive, I like it very much.

**Ke:** I can't say for sure there is such a song, but isn't it that Diane Keaton sing that song, playing guitar in the movie 'Reds'? Well, to put aside the words of the song, the title contains my sincere thought for the daughters who decided to come out of 'mother's yard.'

**Ki:** I see. I saw the movie but don't remember the scene. Now, it was published by a hard covered in 1992. Do you remember reader's response at that time?

**Ke:** I think it was accepted quite well in general and heard later many women interested in 'Women's Studies' had read eagerly.

### 〈Childhood and Upbringing as an Illegitimate child〉

**Ki:** May I get back to your childhood? Born as an illegitimate child (put aside when you knew the fact), you mentioned that you didn't know how to take it that you were 'different' from other kids when you were jeered by playmates due to your fatherless.

**Ke:** Well, to begin with, I was thought to be a vague child whose

languages couldn't follow the shaking of my emotion, coming to think of it now. When I was around 5 yrs. old, I gave those kids biscuits. You know, I unconsciously let their mouth shut by screwing biscuits in, if I'm allowed to exaggerate. That was my first experience to feel the sense of humiliation. I never forget it. I usually felt great discrepancy between other children and I that couldn't be possibly filled, so rather not to talk nor explain my situation. I was a child who took the choice shutting my mouth up...not to take communication with them. At the same time, I became to know the joy to play alone by myself fantasizing... It didn't mean that I was always isolated. No, I played with them a lot during my childhood.

**Ki:** It must have been tough for you, needless to say.

**Ke:** Everybody responded as such but it's hard to empathize the hardships of minority people encountered. It's laborious to convince that we minorities are not different.

**Ki:** Of course, I agree with you. By the way, you called your biological father as 'someone like that' (both laughter). It seems there are many Japanese family without father, so to speak. I did have a father all right and supported us financially but didn't like him at all. It's been 40 years since his death, I still have no feeling toward him. In your case, if not impolite, as you don't accept 'him' as your 'father', it's like the 'virgin conception', isn't it? (both laughter)

#### 〈Becoming yourself – the issue of identity〉

**Ki:** You mentioned in your book, "I am the one who created by myself". Is this how you feel during your growing up?

**Ke:** I am loved deeply by my mother. She kept telling me that she wanted me very much out of wedlock. That gave me in a way fundamental emotional security. Perhaps there were times when I am waiting alone for mother come back from her work. I was always sitting on the stairs of the apartment, reading all different kinds of books as well as day-dreaming(smile). The stair's fixed spot was my private library. I loved the pictorial books of Flora, Animal and Insect.

They were always in my satchel even if I forgot the textbooks or home works(laughter). Sitting on my spot, I picked up likable 'residents' (flowers, animals, and story's main characters, etc.) in the books and let them live in my mind. Sometimes I talked to my 'residents', even my secrecy. Pretty 'older sister-chan' living in the same apartment who were dancers or worked at drink bars kept watching over me.

**Ki:** That's nice. You wrote them in *Women of the Summer Grasses*. Now any impact on you the word of 'Love Child'?

**Ke:** I became to know the word from the song of Diana Ross & Supremes. The discovery of new concept for all illegitimate children! I was happy to get to know it. The naming gave me very comfortable shock. It's like the discovery of the concept of 'sexual harassment.' Right, Kiyomi-san? (**Ki:** Yes, absolutely). According to Susanne Langer, an American philosopher, the new discovery on invisible things and/or scenes generally must be put the light. When

and if you use the same concept or language, you couldn't discover an 'invisible parts of society and human relationship.' I'd like to select such languages as much as possible.

**Ki:** You got much influence from your mother to establish your own identity?

**Ke:** Yes, I should say so. Having had rather old-type education, mother must have had a hardship rearing me at that time but never tried to hide the fact nor grumbling about it. My mother was a kind of an individualist in that era who told me always to think the things by myself and to do by my decision.

**Ki:** Your mother from to time to time suffered 'obsessional-compulsive neurosis'. In your book you totally accepted your mother as what she was and concluded at the closing, "I decided not to be the 'Mother's daughter' anymore. It took me too long to come to this simple fact, though. Now I think I live my life very happily."

**Ke:** ...My mother's story's gonna be a long one. I 'd say please to read the book (politely, smile).

**Ki:** All right, Keiko-san. I just want to mention that your struggle how to deal with your mother was sort of painful to read but very moving.

**Ke:** Being an illegitimate child doesn't much bother me as long as becoming my own person, rather the society surrounded me affects me much.

**Ki:** How does it?

**Ke:** Well, as far as violence matter is concerned, I didn't have any violence against me as other kids happen to have them such as child neglect or abuse. But being called 'fatherless kid' can be mental violence. It's not the child's problem, however, no, it's the adult's matter that their sense of discrimination conveys from generation to generation and also among people to be reproduced. I believe that languages never be innocent. So, I keep writing and speaking up.

### 〈Career 1〉

**Ke:** After finishing the university, I got a job at the radio station-Bunka Broadcasting INC. After a while I became a mid-night radio personality(disc jockey) at work, having stayed for 8 years or so.

**Ki:** You soon gained tremendous popularity by not only listeners but also people in general. How do you think that happened to you and why you left your work, nevertheless?

**Ke:** That was just a new role, I think, at that time, maybe out of curiosity, because within radio media, man is the main character and woman, assistant and/or subordinate wherever the sites were. (**Ki:** Is that so?) Yes, nowadays, things have changed a little bit. You know, I didn't (still don't) like an organization itself and the norms of an organization. I hated company's comfort trip and anything asked to do unwillingly as a member's duty of the company. Also, I hated to be put up in gossip pages in weekly magazines about my illegitimacy, etc. I meant just to be employed normally but was treated like an idol.

**Ki:** I was out of country at that time so couldn't listen to your radio program. I assume, though, you were good at dialogue and/or response to listeners...How do you think of fame as well as some kind of power attributed with?

**Ke:** Oh, no. I was (still am) not interested in fame, even feel fearful being famous. It is worthless. I always felt the wind blowing within myself and that of outside world was totally different to me. Only important thing I learned during radio era was people were not the mass. People in front of a radio was always an individual. You know what I mean? Oh, yes, I shouldn't forget to mention in the special case when Tohoku Great Earthquake occurred, I longed for fame with strong power by which I could have brought children to the safer region from Fukushima. That's why I am still strongly get involved in anti-nuclear power plant activities.

### 〈Career 2〉

**Ki:** You studied English Literature at the university. I'd bet you like literature.

**Ke:** Indeed! (Joyful) I wanted to read many English-written Literatures such as Kathrine Mansfield, Lillian Hellman and Virginia Woolf etc. in their original language.

**Ki:** Do all those women's writer encourage you to become a writer?

**Ke:** More or less, I think. I'd like to write anyway.

**Ki:** How do you become to be a writer?

**Ke:** As I mentioned, I hated my role at the radio station so decided to quit. Around that time, my early 30', I wrote first non-fictional writing (stray note) *Happiness of a full of Spoon* which was well-sold and continually made many editions. Then I had published 'feminism tetralogy', *The Rape*(1982), *Iced Woman*(1985), *Second Rape*(1994paperback), *Sexual Harassment*(2001booklet). Since then I don't know how many books I had published because I never count my works, maybe more than at least 100 in paperback.

**Ki:** How does writing mean to you?

**Ke:** That should be some kinds of affirmation to be myself. Or try to get to know a distance between other and me.

**Ki:** Any future plan on writing?

**Ke:** Oh well, not that clear yet...

**Ki:** I want to refer the Crayon House shortly which includes women's book store(Ms. Crayon house), children's book & toy store, and organic clothes & many kinds of goods store. The patio at the basement there is organic restaurant called 'Agora' also selling organic vegetables & fruits, etc. It was opened by Keiko 41 years ago. The building is always surrounded by all kinds of beautiful flowers. You are crazy of flowers & plants, right, Keiko-san. (Ke: Yes!)

### 〈Feminism〉

**Ki:** When do you know of feminism?

**Ke:** Well, my original family was all women's family(later mother & me alone). I am not getting to it today. It's in my book. I went to the girl's school from junior high to high-school although university was

co-ed. During these school days, we did everything all by ourselves and felt resistance against 'girls be protected'. To recall my childhood, I didn't like children's books in which a princess was enduring someone's bullying and she has to be rescued by a prince like *White Snow Princess*. Before feminism, I know the word 'herstory' from *A Little house* by Virginia Lee Burton. I felt, "oh dear, there is such a word" In other episode, I was in the group of some 'demo' when I was a student and got suddenly period. One woman older than me in the group gave me 'a period napkin'. I felt very comfortable on women's friendship. I was very shocked to know that 'strange fruit' hanging down from the tree means an African American. It is by Billie Holiday's 'Strange Fruit'. This is the reason I like the African-music. So, Kiyomi-san, all environmental factors plus my subjective frame work of thinking as well as my interest to the outside world, to me, just inevitably had encountered with feminism. I still like feminism.

**Ki:** Thank very much for being with me today.

**Ke:** You are more than welcome.



〈Feminism〉