

## 高齢者に対する傾聴 —中島まさのの詩を例に—

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## Active Listening to the Elderly —The Case of Nakashima Masao's Poetry—

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### Abstract

In an aged society, it is very important to make a cultural environment that accepts and embraces aging. The elderly are not always physically and spiritually weak individuals that have to be taken care of. They have rich spirits.

Though Nakashima Masano was just an average woman, she was discovered as a poet at the age of 77, and she continued to be a poet until she passed away at the age of 88. She was awarded with many prizes. She was discovered as a poet when her daughter Tomoko became aware of the fact that her words were very impressive. She was one of the many examples of the rich inner world that ordinary senior citizens have locked away, fortunately hers was brought out.

We examined some of her poems. They contain humor and are full of life's messages that the elderly can come up with. In addition, it became clear that she tried to live her life to the fullest. She was one of the many elderly people. We consider a mental state of the elderly and the possibility of unlocking the affluent knowledge that is stored away in all senior citizens by examining Masano's poems and her case as an example.

Each senior citizen has the potential to show what is in their minds and share it with others, if only they have the chance. Listening to ordinary senior citizens is very enjoyable, and if people realize the rich inner world of the elderly, they will treat them with more respect, and the elderly will feel accepted and their self-esteem will be higher. We will be better at embracing the aging process. This is a practical report of her eleven-years of poetry based on her life.

**Key words :** active listening to the elderly; inner world of the elderly;  
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### 1. INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that by 2025 Japan will

plunge into an aged society, in which one out of four people are over 65 years old. Therefore, we should not approach our

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destiny by denying the inevitable and trying to cling to youthfulness, but instead by making a cultural environment that accepts and embraces aging.

The elderly are often regarded as physically and spiritually weak individuals that have to be taken care of, however, that is not always true. Since they have lived long lives, they are sensible and have rich spirits even if they are not particularly special people. It is a pity that is not a well known fact, and it has something to do with the way people treat and degrade them. In addition, it is a waste of the wisdom that the elderly have to offer society.

There was a woman who was discovered to be a poet at the age of 77, and continued to be a poet until she passed away at the age of 88. Her name was Nakashima Masano, and she was my mother. She expressed her feelings, sensibility and emotions towards nature and mankind. She did this by using everyday language that was rich with dialects and her poems impressed many people. As a result she was awarded with many prizes. She was just an average woman, but one of the many examples of the rich inner world that ordinary senior citizens have locked away, fortunately hers was brought out.

The purpose of this paper is to consider a mental state of the elderly and the possibility of unlocking the affluent knowledge that is stored away in all senior citizens by examining Masano's poems as an example. This is a practical report of her eleven-years of poetry based on her life.

## 2. THE LIFE OF NAKASHIMA MASANO

Nakashima Masano was born in Shosha Tai, which is now in Himeji city, on January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1915. She had three brothers and she was the eldest of four sisters. Her maiden name was Kawashima and her family was quite wealthy. However, after she was born, the family's money started to vanish even though they had a male servant that brought her a hot lunch to school. This was partly because her father was not a hard worker. The other part of the problem was her eldest brother did not get along well with her father. Though her father insisted that he should be a farmer, he did not like farming. This led to her brother falling into the wrong crowd and acquiring a large debt due to a gambling problem. In order to resolve this problem, the family had to sell a lot of their property. Through this experience, she said that she learned that each person has their own strengths, and it is very important for them to develop these strengths. Young Masano also felt a lot of sorrow for her mother because of this situation, and she thought about her often throughout her life. In her last days, she said, "If she were alive, I would carry her on my back and show her our autumn festival."

At the age of 15, she went to a nursing school. After finishing school, she began to work as a nurse at the Kondo Clinic in Himeji. Then she married Nakashima Manazuru in Shikama County, where they lived for the rest of their lives. It was an arranged marriage, and I was their only

child. Though the Nakashima family was a great landowner before World War II and her father-in-law became a postmaster of Tokura Privately-Owned Post Office in 1923, they lost almost all of their property because of The Farmland Reform Act of 1947. Her husband was ill and she was forced to work as a clerk at the post office though not only her father-in-law but her brother-in-law was once a postmaster there. Later the post office was relinquished to a new postmaster and it was very hard for her and she was very upset. Though it was difficult, she struggled to keep the Nakashima family from their social decline. She retired at the age of 60, and began to enjoy growing rice, vegetables, and flowers.

After Manazuru passed away in 1984, she lived alone. So I sometimes visited her and began to pay attention to what she said and wrote. I became aware of the fact that her words are very impressive and wondered if they might be the subject for good poetry. So I began to send them to the poetry corner of the Kobe Newspaper. At the age of 77, she became a poet. Her poems started to be highly appreciated and they were in the Kobe Newspaper quite often. Her poem "I'll brace myself" was chosen for the best poem of the year, and she was awarded with the 2002 best prize in the field of poetry. In addition, her poem "A 78 Year Old and a 17year Old" was chosen for the 1994 best prize in the Harima Literature Festival, "Because They Are Our Mice" was accepted in the 1999 Kobe Citizen's Literature Contest, and "Offering" was chosen for the 2002 Hyogo Poetry Festival.

In September of 2002, when she was 87, she was diagnosed with lung cancer and the doctor announced that she may live for only one more year. Her family members could not decide on a way of treatment. I told her there were two choices, one was radioactive treatment, and the other was to stay at home. Her decision was the latter. So she stayed at home and lived her life as positively as she used to. She continued riding her tricycle and attending to her garden.

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, 2003, which is her 88<sup>th</sup> birthday, she published her poetry book "Fushigi." In the spring of the year, she gradually began to lose her strength and coughed a lot, however, she accepted her reality with humor. In those days her poems were full of the beautiful qualities of life, acceptance, and self realization. She rode her tricycle and took care of her garden until the end of August. In August she visited her sick sister in the hospital three times. On October eighth of that year, she went to a hospice and passed away on November second. On the last day of her life, she told me that if Ito Shinsui (a famous Japanese painter) had drawn me, it would have been a fine work. Masano encouraged me until her last breath.

### 3 . MASANO'S ENCOUNTER WITH POETRY

Masano and poetry, it was a very interesting encounter. It seemed to me that Masano had lived in a world which was far from poetry. When I was in my teens, I swore at her for not being academic or imaginative. I

told her that she did not read any books and just worked and ate to live. In addition, I told her that she was robbing me of my hope for life. In those days I could not understand the hardships she had been facing.

It was after many years that I changed my view about her. Since she started to live alone after Manazuru had passed away, I began to visit her more often and began to spend more time with her than before. On one winter day in 1992, I went to Masano's house, and found some beautiful red flowers in the pots outside. They were so beautiful in the cold wind that I looked closely at them. They were made of my old socks with patches that I wore when I was five or six years old. The stems were made of chopsticks, and covered with old green cloth. She made leaves too. They were really beautiful and made my heart warm. Masano was beside me and said shyly that winter was desolate and naked. I looked at her as if I were looking at somebody else. I was moved by her sensibilities and creativity. Since then I began to pay attention to her behavior and words.

One day I visited her to pick up Hiroko, my daughter, who sometimes went to see her grandmother on weekends. I asked Masano what they had done that day. She said, "On our way to visit a grave, we passed a river and saw some crucian carp swimming. Wishing them to be in the pond in my garden, Hiroko and I bought a net at Jusco. And with a bucket in hand and with rain boots on, we went to catch them. But they were too smart for us. We

couldn't catch any no matter how hard we tried." At that point in time Masano was 77 and Hiroko was 16. What she said was so rhythmic and heartwarming that I memorized it by heart and wrote it down soon after. Again I became aware of the fact that her words were very impressive and she was full of creativity and imagination. I also found this in her letters and running scripts. I was very moved by her words because they contained a sense of humor, warmth, and generosity, which I did not possess. I wondered if they might be the subject for good poetry. I began to send them to the poetry corner of the Kobe Newspaper. At the age of 77, her daily words became poetry. The poem, "A 77 Year Old and a 16 Year Old" was awarded the best prize at the 1994 Harima Literature Festival.

Whenever I visited her, I listened to her and wrote down her words. After I wrote them down, I asked her if they were exactly what she said. If she agreed, I sent them out, otherwise I did not. Her expressions were very heartwarming and humorous. There were a lot of messages in them which only the elderly could come up with. Hiroko and I were so inspired by Masano's poems that we decided to write our own poetry and send it to the Kobe Newspaper too. Masano's poems were in the newspaper quite often, and many of them were selected as the best poems of the week. Therefore she was awarded with the 2002 best prize in the field of poetry at the age of 87 in addition to other prizes I mentioned before.

Masano never thought that she would

write poems. Whenever she read her poems in the newspaper, she said, “Well, well, well, thank you. They are exactly what I thought.” Since Masano was a working mother, I was not able to spend much time with her, and in my adolescence I was quite defiant despite my love for her. It took me a long time to get to know and understand her. However, by listening and recording her words I began to understand her. Poetry made it possible to know her feelings, sorrows, and pleasures, in other words, her inner world, and her way of living.

#### 4. MASANO'S POEMS

Masano's poems can be divided into three groups.

- (1) “Pleasure in daily life” in which she described the joys and humor she found in her routine.
- (2) “With Aging,” in which she described her realization of the aging process, however, she lived her life positively, and never lost her liveliness. In those days she began to feel something was wrong with her physical condition.
- (3) “Life and Death,” in which she looked at her life more keenly than before and described her hardships with humor through her last days. She wrote these poems after she learned that she had lung cancer and her physical condition was getting worse.

These are some of her poems.

##### 1. Pleasure in Daily Life

A 77 Year Old and a 16 Year Old  
On our way to visit a grave  
We passed a river and saw some crucian  
carp swimming  
Wishing them to be in the pond in my  
garden  
Hiroko and I bought a net at Jusco  
And with a bucket in hand  
And with rain boots on  
We went to catch them  
But they were too smart for us  
We couldn't catch any no matter how hard  
we tried

\* Her granddaughter, Hiroko, lived in Kakogawa city, and visited her on weekends. They often paid a visit to their ancestor's tomb.

A 78 Year Old and a 17 Year Old  
Having taken off my casual sandals  
Wearing Hiroko's school shoes she's outgrown  
Hanging on to Hiroko  
I went to see plum blossoms  
\* This poem shows the passing of time from when Hiroko was taken to the plum blossoms by her grandmother, to when Hiroko had grown up and took Masano there. Masano was only 138 centimeters tall and round. The expression of “hanging on to Hiroko” shows the passing of time and the scenery of deep affection between the two.

Life  
The cloth used for my dear granddaughter's  
diapers  
Have turned into my underwear  
I'm thankful for the long life of cloth  
Japanese radish and spinach are growing in

my vegetable garden

My granddaughter is a freshman in college

\* This poem celebrates the life of the cloth, her granddaughter, and her vegetables. She gave thanks to them all. She made her underwear out of used diapers and this is one of the many examples of her devised methods of recycling.

#### Thickly Clad and Bundled

Seeing tiered layers of clothes at my neck  
“Wow! How many clothes do you wear?”

Everyone was astonished

Being asked next time

I am going to say that I wear a ceremonial robe of a court lady

\* A sense of humor and wit were a part of her life.

#### Watermelon

My watermelon was growing big

And I had enjoyed seeing it

Yesterday I had a gloomy foreboding

And I covered it with a leaf of a pumpkin

But today the melon was gone

It was not ripe enough to eat

No use at all to the thief

I can't help feeling pity for my watermelon

#### Because They Are Our Mice

Yesterday I closed the doors rightly

For fear of having our Japanese rice eaten

This morning I found some of it gone

“What lucky mice they are to feast on Japanese rice!”

Said my daughter

But it's all right

Because they are our mice

\* Her love for her watermelon and even for “her mice” is described.

<Cultural note>

In the year this poem was written, Japan suffered from a rice shortage because of bad weather, and so rice was imported from Southeast Asia.

#### A Letter to My Granddaughter

At a flower center

I rode in a wheelchair for the first time

Being pushed

I couldn't thank your parents enough

Passing by a child in a stroller

Your father said to me

“She is your junior because you are older than she”

Your mother smiled saying

“No she is your senior because the baby girl has spent more time in a stroller”

#### I love the Flower Center

And you, Hiroko

\* This is actually a letter to Hiroko. The last two lines are an example of her direct way of expression.

<Cultural note>

In Japan, it is necessary to understand someone's position in society. Someone who is either more experienced or older is often referred to as being “the senior or superior member.”

#### The First Thing in the Morning

Hey let's go, Hey let's go

A dash of tea, water, and rice

I carry on the tray to a god, Buddah, and Minobu

I pray that you continue to help us today  
As you always have

Hey let's go, Hey let's go  
Riding my trustworthy tricycle  
I go to mail a letter to my granddaughter  
The sun shows its face

Hey let's go, Hey let's go  
Another active day starts

## 2 . With Aging

### 83 Years Old II

Inch by inch my legs shrink  
With my mind and words together  
Yo-ho  
I begin to stand up with my hands and legs  
on the floor

### Offering

I happened to find tea, water, and rice  
In the hall in the evening  
Which I thought I had offered to our family  
Buddhist altar early this morning  
Probably somebody came in  
When I was carrying them Yo-ho! Yo-ho!

### In My Own Way

Though my sister passed away a week ago,  
I sometimes wonder who it was  
The scenery from the car doesn't come into  
my mind as straight as it used to do  
Everything is foggy  
At the age of 84  
Some are firm and some are not  
I should get old in my own way

### Artificial Flowers

"Why did you buy such gaudy things?"  
Said my daughter  
Yet these artificial flowers are good  
Because they are always fresh, brisk, and  
strong  
I feel that way all the more because I am  
getting weaker

### Even Though

Even though I'm so tired  
I still want to go to my vegetable garden  
Just to feel the dirt on the sole of my feet

### I'll Brace Myself

Though I tried to take my onions over there  
And to bring my potatoes here  
I couldn't  
As my head does not work  
Neither do my feet  
Oh well  
I'll brace myself with a cup of rice

In these poems she described her aging. In "Offering," she described her routines with humor. In "Artificial Flowers," she described her aging. From each poem we can feel she tried to brace herself as she found herself getting weaker and forgetful, which can be said to be a mental state of the elderly. When Masano bought gaudy artificial flowers, I thought she did not have good taste and she should have bought living flowers instead. I could not understand this. She bought them because they were always strong and they never die. The flowers were her hope. I am afraid that most elderly people do not have a chance to express themselves as well as Masano did,

and they are left misunderstood. Most of them have conflict and frustration in their souls. More or less this is because they can not express themselves. And as a result they may feel left out. This is due to their aging, in other words, they lose speaking and hearing abilities. In addition, they are afraid that younger generation might not try to understand their inner world. It is not too much to say that her poems tell us about the mental state of the elderly.

### 3 . Life and Death

These are the poems after she learned that she had life threatening cancer.

To Fresh Leaves

Good morning !

Oh, you are so beautiful

Really beautiful !

Each green is different though you look alike

Each has each its own color

And is beautiful

\* In her later days, she often talked about her eldest brother who died young. This occurred because of the discord with his father. Though he caused many problems to his family, she loved him and felt pity for him. His strength was not understood by his father. In "To Fresh Leaves," she talked about the importance to praise individual strengths.

88 Years and 7 Months Old

As one gets old

The spine gets crooked

Many wrinkles on the face

Lots of coughs and wheezing  
A rugged face and noisy lungs  
Very showy

Cough

My stomach and intestines  
Surge and turn all over, topsy-turvy  
Make a somersault  
It's a good exercise  
It's very tough all the more  
It's really, really tough

88 Years and 8 Months Old

I'll be thinner and thinner

And die

My friends and neighbors, Ms.Tada,  
Tuchiyama, and Matuoka

They all passed away

Everyone passes away

Nothing to be afraid of

\* "88 Years and 8 months Old" was the last poem shown in the Kobe Newspaper on December first, 2003.

## 5 . POEMS ABOUT MASANO

These are the poems written about Masano by Tomoko and Hiroko. From them the mental state of the elderly people can be understood.

Wrapping Cloth

The wrapping cloth Mother had thrown away

"Maybe a mouse has eaten away at this old wrapping cloth

Because of the pain of childbirth"

Grandmother washed the old worn



wrapping cloth

And hung it out to dry in the sun

by Hiroko Nakajima

\* This poem was written by Hiroko. If I had seen Masano washing the worn wrapping cloth with holes in it, I would have said, "It would be a waste of time, you should throw it away" and never thought of a mouse giving childbirth. This poem was made due to her imagination, her love for mice, and her experience.

<Cultural note>

"A wrapping cloth" is a "furoshiki" in Japanese. A "furoshiki" is often decorated with designs. When not in use, it can be folded up and put away. It is used to wrap and carry packages and bottles.

For Ever

What a big paunch !

"There are Kobang in it"

For ever

For ever

I want to hear Mother's humorous words

She is going to turn 83 soon

by Tomoko Nakashima

"There are Kobang in it" What a wit and sense of humor !

<Culture note>

"Kobang" is a small-sized oval Japanese gold coin which was used from the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century (when the Edo period ended) .

Masano

"My legs don't work I can't walk

I only wear a cap as if I were working hard

I can't do anything

I am too tired

I just live to breathe

Where will they hold my funeral?

It will be in a ceremonial hall after all

It will be too much to have many people come to this house"

After she came back from her vegetable garden

She sighed for while and said

"Oh, well, I'll eat Zenzai"

by Tomoko Nakashima

\* Even though she was grieving over the aging process for a short period of time, she always braced herself. One of Masano's poems ("I'll Brace Myself") ends with the line "I'll brace myself with a cup of rice." In another one of her poems ("A Rice Child"), there is a phrase: "My mother said, "Eat a lot, eating power." She must have thought she would be strong if she ate. Her mother's words were always with her and encouraged her throughout her life.

<Cultural note>

"Zenzai" is a thick bean-meal soup with sugar and rice cake.

Relief

When I said to my mother,

"You coughed a lot during the night, didn't you?"

She replied, "No, I don't think so.

I don't remember."

When I said at the end of the day,

"You had a hard day."

She said, "I am in the worst condition of my

life. From here things will only get better.”

I was encouraged and relieved by her words

## 6 . THE WORLD OF MASANO' S POETRY

Her poems are highly appreciated by both ordinary people, professional poets, and critics. Elderly readers say: “Masano’s poems talk to me!” In some homes for the elderly, they enjoy reading them in chorus. Middle-aged readers feel encouraged by them and think it is not too bad to get old. Critics and poets do not hesitate to show their surprise. A poet named Takanashi Kiichi wrote: “I was not surprised that Masano was an old starter, but that each of her poems was crystallized, though they were simple and ingenuous.” Takanashi added: “These poems could never be made intentionally, and Muse of Poetry must have dwelled in her daily words.” In addition, a poet named Wagou Ryouichi commented: “There was a product of space, which no one could follow, and that her poems succeeded in engendering primitive appeal.”

One of the reasons why they are impressed by her poems is that her poems are easy to understand, and her words come straight to them. The poetry evokes sympathy from the readers. The poems are so simple that they could have been written by children, however there is something profound that carries the truth of life in them. It was very unusual for her to start writing poetry at the age of 77, however it is one of the distinct characteristics of her work. The

poetry is simple, but profound, humorous, rhythmic, accepting, and full of various Japanese dialects.

A Haiku poet, Tubouchi Nenten referred to her humor in the Kyoto Newspaper on February 19th, 2003, as follows: “Though expression in the form of poetry is usually for the youth and is often very hard to understand, this trend has been changing a lot these days… Elderly poetry shows new characteristics of humor and Masano’s poems are a good example of this.” Nenten quoted the poem below and added that he liked the expression “let the full bucket walk.”

An 83 Year Old in the Vegetable Garden  
I can’t carry a bucket of water easily  
Step by step I can move a bucket  
And let the full bucket walk  
Led by a bucket of water  
I follow along behind

Even when she was getting weaker, and she was in the worst physical condition, she never forgot to look at herself objectively. Even her aging, hardships, rugged face and noisy lungs became the subjects of her poems. She thought it was quite natural to get old, and she seemed to enjoy it. Her humor came from her strength, as if to say “yes” to life. After a lot of ups and downs, she learned to yield herself to the years. She could see herself objectively though she was in the center of her life. That is what age can do after many years of experiences. She could write poems which encouraged many people because she lived her life to the fullest. A poet named Yasumizu Toshikazu concluded in

the Kobe Newspaper on December 23rd, 2002 when she was awarded with the 2002 best prize in the field of poetry of the Kobe Newspaper, as follows: “Her poems all show the greatness and wonder of life. They are full of life’s messages, which can never be found anywhere else.”

## 7. CONCLUSION

We can see from her poems that she was an aged woman that enjoyed examining herself in order to live life to the fullest. This is the case with most senior citizens. Even if their spines are crooked, and they are losing their memories, they try to live their lives to the fullest in their own ways, though they may not be able to express themselves. Masano was just an average woman. She had the chance to directly express her feelings in the form of poetry. It is interesting that her poems did not only impress ordinary people, but also professional poets and critics. She had no intentions of being praised or noticed. She just expressed the pleasures in living daily life, aging, and death. She could make poems because she had experienced many years of life. Her poems showed a rich inner world that ordinary senior citizens usually lock away.

The poetry in her daily speech was discovered when I began to carefully listen to her murmurs. The elderly are usually reserved and passive because they know that they are always on the side of being taken care of. They constantly say “thank you,” but rarely hear it. In addition, because

of their poor hearing and speaking abilities, they are not able to express themselves. But their strengths can be found in their life stories. Each is a hero or a heroin in their own life. Therefore it is important to stop, wait, and listen to the elderly with an open heart. Never say: “Don’t be silly like a child,” or “Don’t talk like a child.” People around them can learn from their wisdom. Listening to ordinary senior citizens is very enjoyable, and can evoke rich feelings. You may even be surprised by their incredible senses of humor and wisdom. Each aged person has the potential to show what is in their minds, and share it with others, if only they have the chance. If we realize this, The elderly will be treated with more respect, and we will be better at embracing the aging process.

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### 高齢者に対する傾聴

#### —中島まさのの詩を例に—

四人に一人が高齢者となる本格的な高齢社会に入ろうとする現在、老いを否定し、若さを維持、強調するアンチエイジングではなく、高齢者の「強み」を知ること、「老い」を楽しむ引き受ける感性が必要とされている。

詩とは無縁の世界に住んでいたと思われていた中島まさのは、77歳から詩人となり死を迎えた88歳まで日常の輝き、老い、生と死を日常の言葉、晩州弁で詠み続けた。多くの人に感動を与え、多くの賞を受賞した。素朴な暖かさ、老いを受け入れる心の動きなど、高齢者だからこそ描くことができた世界がある。

まさのの詩を例として取り上げ、弱りゆく自分を見つめ、それでも自分なりに一生懸命生きようとする高齢者共通の姿や内面を探る。そして、娘の友子がまさのの言葉を傾聴したことから始まったまさのと詩の出会いについて、傾聴の重要について実証、報告する。