
*The Fox’s Window and Other Stories* contains thirty of Naoko Awa’s (1943 – 1993) “fables” and “fairy tales” in Toshiya Kamei’s translation. The stories in this collection are not from a single book according to Toshiya Kamei’s “Translator’s Note,” but from a large number of books Kamei read in childhood and also recommended by Shigemitsu Fujisawa in his book, *Fantasy Woven by Heart: Naoko Awa’s Spectrum*.

Naoko Minegishi (“Awa” is her pen-name) was born in Tokyo in the year World War II ended. She published her first story “An Organ in a Moonlight” in 1962, while studying at Japan Women’s University [Nihon Joshi-dai]. From that time onward, she published in every issue of a literary coterie magazine, *Pirates*, which she and her friends launched in 1966. One of her stories, “Pepper-tree Kid” earned the Newcomer Award from the Association for Japanese Children’s Literature in 1969. The “Pepper-tree Kid” is about the spirit of a lonely koshô–pepper tree, which is lonelier than the spirit of the magnolia tree in “The Large Magnolia” (1993) in Kamei’s collection. Other awards Awa received during her thirty-year literary career include: a Cultural Award by Sankei Publisher for Children’s Literature for “Handkerchief Left Behind by the North Wind” (1972); the Shôgaku-kan Literary Award for *The Songs of Winds and Trees* (1973), the Ministry of Health and Welfare Central Council for Children’s Welfare Award for “The Spring Wind’s Drum” (1980), Noma Children’s Literature Award for *Wild Rose Village* (1982), Niimi Nankichi Children’s
Literature Award for *Children's Story about Mountains: Wind's Roller Skates* (1985), and the Hirosuke Children's Story Award for “Stories about Sayo: While the Beans Are Cooking” (1991). Awa’s plan to write a series about Sayo was cut short by her death from pneumonia in 1993. Meanwhile, Awa’s “Fox’s Window,” Bird, “A Blue Flower,” “Wind-chime in Autumn,” “A Leaf Fish,” “A Present from a Sparrow,” “The Raccoon’s Telephone is Forest #1,” “On a Moon-lit Night,” “Breakfast made by Mice,” “The Spring Wind’s Drum,” “A Guest in the Evening,” “Gentle Dandelions,” were included in Japanese K through 12 grade textbooks. These lists suggest that a translation of Awa Naoko’s tales is long overdue. At the same time, we are tempted to express our regret that only seven of these award-winning and textbook-adopted stories are included in Kamei’s collection.

Kamei rightly places Awa’s works with the Western “fairy tale” and “fable” genres, using “fairy tale” as *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1999) does:

> In its written form the fairy tale tends to be a narrative in prose about the fortunes and misfortunes of a hero or heroine who, having experienced various adventures of a more or less supernatural kind, lives happily ever after. Magic, charms, disguise and spells are some of the major ingredients of such stories, which are often subtle in their interpretation of human nature and psychology.¹

Awa’s stories also conform to the definition of fairy tales in the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* which emphasizes the appearance of talking animals, ogres and witches.

The “interpretation of human nature and psychology” in Penguin’s definition further relates the fairy tales to “fables” which feature moral lessons.

Awa’s works are fairy-tale-like and fable-like in multiple ways. First of all, the time frame of each story is vague. Most of her tales begin with something like, “Once upon a time,” “One spring afternoon,” or “Once in a large town.” The stage settings of each tale are no clearer: “On a back street,” “In his small clinic in town,” and “There once was a mysterious place called the Forest of Voices.” Among Kamei’s collection, only “While the Beans Are Cooking” gives place names, such as Mt. Warabi, Mitsumori Pass, Kumazasa Hill, and Takara Hot Spring. These places exist in real Japan, but not in a single prefecture as Awa has them. The vagueness of the time and place frames helps Awa lead her audience to abstract and “supernatural” worlds.

In Awa’s “supernatural” worlds, people can breathe and talk at the bottom of the sea, and rabbits, narcissus flower bulbs, moths, and others can talk to the humans. People and non-humans can marry each other. Plants, animals, birds, and seasons can become humans. People can become birds or wind. And there are old women who can cast magic spells. Most characters are nameless or have old-fashioned names like Chôkichi, Ichirô, Mohei, Ito, Yae, and Sayo. Food from traditional Japanese kitchens (udon-noodles, dumplings, manjû buns, sweet ohagi) set our minds in familiar yet non-specific worlds. So do the garments from different historical periods. In “Winter Girl,” for example, a girl sits on top of a horse-cart-full of cabbages to be delivered to a distant market town. She wears shiny leather boots, a glass-bead necklace and even false eyelashes. Her outfit does not match the archaic horse cart she is riding. Most protagonists are poor farmers, fishermen, or inn-keepers living on the outskirts of civilization uncontaminated by
modern conveniences, but they have access to busses, trains, and roller skates. The mismatches throw the audience into surrealistic “supernatural” worlds.

The relationship between the humans and the non-humans is not consistent. The humans may be friendly to non-humans; the non-humans may be nice to the humans; people may be unkind to the non-humans, non-humans may be unkind to the humans; people can break the balance nature is trying to maintain, and the list goes on. Awa’s stories are amusing, eerie, and vaguely didactic or moralistic. Not so much by each story, but collectively, they make us sensitive to the spirits and minds of non-humans. They turn unlimited species of non-humans into beings rather than things. In this sense, her stories may be characterized as ecological.

As to Kamei’s translation, it is adequate at first, but matures as it progresses. An addition of the word “rocking” in front of the “chair” in the title of “The Sky-colored Chair” [Sora-iro no yuri-isu], for instance, would give a more accurate image of the chair Awa talks about. And “cute” or “charming” would translate Awai’s “kawaii” better than “pretty” (p. 12). The word “pretty” or “charming” would work better than “wonderful” in the following line; “wonderful” is too general to describe a cute little baby rocking chair. Also, the carpenter’s utterance, “Why don’t you have a seat, honey?” on the same page fails to convey the bubbling joy the expectant parents are sharing as they speak. A plain, “Try it, honey!” would transmit “Omae, chotto suwatte goran” better. Awa’s texts abound in little nuances, which are often expressed by adjectives and adverbs. Some of the words Kamei did not bother to translate are: “sorewa (“tremendously” or “indeed”)” in front of “sturdy” (p. 12, line 3), “jōkigen de (“happily” or “in good humor”)” (p. 12, line 11), “yura yura to (“leisurely swinging back and forth”)” (p. 12, line 13). This does not mean that translators must translate each and all the words in the text. A good translation
would use words that would imply or replace the fancy adjectives and adverbs. And that is exactly what Kamei’s later sentences in this collection do. Examples are: “The view was so inviting that I wanted to stay” (p. 41) (kononama hikikaesu nante nandaka mottainasasugimasu” whose literal translation can be “the view was too beautiful to walk away”; “I sprang to my feet” (p. 41) (gabatto tachiagarimshita, whose literal translation without the onomatopoetic “gabatto” would be “I abruptly stood up”); “A chill ran down her spine” (p. 149) (nanto osoroshii hanashi darô ka to omotta no deshita,” which can be literally translated as “It was an amazingly horrifying story.”

Finally, a mention must be made of minor typographic and editorial errors. “Michiri” (p. 111) should be “Michiru”; “SShe” (p. 123) should be “She”; “The chair-maker decided to . . . “ (p. 12, l. 16) and “Knock, knock” (p. 30) should start a new line; “except for” (p. 43) should be “only”; “her hair tossing wildly” (p. 48) should be “tousled hair.” Also, the title story should be listed before the 29 others.

All in all, The Fox’s Window is a precious book that would open people’s minds. The translation is nicely done and the illustrations are stunning.