"NAUGHTY GIRLS," "BAD WIVES" AND "UNWISE MOTHERS": EARLY STORIES BY ÔBA MINAKO IN THE LITERARY-SOCIAL CONTEXT OF JAPAN OF THE 1960S

by

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Honors Diploma, Far-Eastern State University, 1982

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Department of Asian Studies)

We accept this thesis as conforming to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

June 2002

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores Ôba Minako’s (1930-) philosophy of the feminine in the literary-social context of Japan of the 1960s. Ôba is one of the most remarkable contemporary Japanese women writers both as a talented author and a social nonconformist. Ôba’s revolutionary concepts of the feminine were the most explicitly articulated in her early stories, “Kôzu no nai e” [Picture with no Composition] (1963), “Niji to ukihashi” [The Rainbow and a Floating Bridge] (1967) and “Sanbiki no kani” [The Three Crabs] (1967).

The main body of my thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter One begins with a brief overview of the basic aspects of human sexuality, the genesis of the institution of marriage and family, and the roots of the subordinate status of women. It also includes a very concise history of the gender relations in premodern Japan and the evolution of those into the reactionary concept “ryôsai kenbo” [good wife, wise mother] during the Meiji period (1868-1911). This concept survived Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War and the following democratization of the country’s political and social systems. In 1960s in Japan it still remained a dominant idea in gender relations.

The second chapter of my thesis deals with the texts of Ôba’s early stories, mentioned above. These works are analyzed in order to conceptualize Ôba’s views on the feminine and the marital-familial system.


Having examined the above-mentioned texts, I conclude that the philosophy of the feminine, which Ôba Minako articulated in her early stories, boldly and openly challenged the Japanese establishment and its “good wife, wise mother” dogma, which remained a cornerstone of gender relations in the 1960s. The radicalism and unorthodoxy of this author’s views went far ahead of her time, having almost no analogues in Japanese women’s literature of that time.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract  ................................................. .iii

Table of Contents  ....................................... .iii

Introduction  .............................................. 1

Chapter I  “Good Wife, Wise Mother”. The Fruits of Social Engineering  ............... 8

Chapter Two  An Overlooked Rebellion  .............................................. 18

Chapter Three  Was There a Precursor?  ............................................ 39

Bibliography  .............................................. 59
Introduction

Among the works published in the June issue of the Gunzô magazine was a *shōsetsu* "Sanbiki no kani" [The Three Crabs] by first-time writer Ōba Minako (1930–). This literary debut by an unknown author turned out to be such a brilliant piece of fiction, that it brought its author two of the most prestigious awards of the *bundan*, and started one of the most brilliant and envied careers in the history of post-World War II Japanese women’s literature.

The story portrayed a heroine who, in her quest to explore her true inner self, breaks not just the norms of “decency,” but also rebels against the rigidly prescribed roles of “wife” and “mother.” Notably these twin roles—epitomized in the legacy of the “ryōsai kenbo” [good wife, wise mother] dogma, a product of the social engineering of the Meiji era (1868-1911)—were, and in many respects remain, the constraints into which the Japanese society confined the feminine. “Ryōsai kenbo” was propagated as an “ideal” of a woman’s life and the standard women’s behavior should follow. It was not something that a woman could disregard without the risk of social ostracism.

Soon after “The Three Crabs,” Ōba Minako published “Niji to ukihashi” [The Rainbow and a Floating Bridge] (July 1968) and “Kōzu no nai e” [Picture With No Composition] (October 1968). These stories were even more revolutionary than “The Three Crabs,” as far as the criticism of the contemporary status of Japanese women and marital-familial practice was concerned.

It should be said that Ōba Minako and her works on the whole drew a great deal of attention from scholars and literary specialists. However, these two early stories for some reason either remained outside of the focus of critics or did not receive the analysis they deserve. In some works on the history of contemporary Japanese literature Ōba Minako’s name is merely mentioned or not mentioned at all.

In my study I pursue two objectives. First, I make a detailed analysis of Ōba’s three early stories—"The Three Crabs," “Niji to ukihashi” and “Kōzu no nai e”—in terms of extrapolating the author’s views on the feminine and the twin feminine roles “wife” and “mother.” Second, this Ōba’s philosophy is projected upon Japanese mainstream women’s fiction of the 1960s to compare her ideas to the concepts that dominated Japanese women’s literature at that time, and to the literary interpretations of the phenomena that determined Japan’s social life. Such a comparative approach could bring an answer to the question which seemed to me very original and worthwhile as a subject of my thesis: was Ōba Minako indeed, as it seemed to me, a lone

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* Shôsetsu is a Japanese term for narrative fiction; it can refer to novels, novellas, and short stories.

** The Japanese literary establishment.
bold warrior in her battle against the suffocating strict constraints of the “ryōsai kenbo” dogma? Or, did she just happen to be merely another extravagant avant-gardist who created, though brilliant, yet another of the numerous variations of the theme that long ago had become commonplace among Japanese women writers?

Ôba Minako’s fiction received a comprehensive study in the works by Sharalyn Orbaugh, Michiko Wilson, Kazuko Hatta, Noriko Mizuta, Ichirō Yahashi, Kyōzaburō Dōmeki and Mitsuo Nakamura. Special attention is due a book by Keiko Yonaha Gendai joryū sakkaron [Theory of contemporary women’s writers] where analysis of Ôba’s works includes her early stories—“Niji to ukihashi” and “Kōzu no nai e.” However, Keiko Yonaha studies Ôba’s works in an isolated manner, without a correlation with Japanese women’s literature on the whole.


Kurahashi’s “Parutai” is acknowledged as the turning point marking the beginning of new era in the Japanese female fiction. Harada Yasuko’s debut Banka [Elegy], published in 1956, became some kind of a bombshell, a slap in the face of the establishment and the social moralité, and I was intrigued to see in “Evening Bells” the evolution of her views. Setouchi Harumi, whose “Natsu no owari” [The End of Summer] won [The Second] Women’s Literature Award, also seemed to me deserving attention in my study, for she mainly wrote about marriage and women at the different stages of their life. The last work I chose for my analysis—Kôno Taeko’s “Saigo no toki”—was a part of the selection with the same title which brought the author [The Sixth] Women’s Literature Award. By the time of publication of “Saigo no toki” Kôno Taeko was already a renowned writer whose short story “Kani” [Crabs] (1963) won the Akutagawa prize. By 1966 she had published a great number of works including the famous “Yōjigari” [Toddler-hunting] (1961) and “Ari takaru” [Ants swarm] (1964), which made her a leading, and, I may say, quite a representative author, as far as Japanese women’s literature of the 1960s is concerned. With an ample selection of stories to choose from, I, nevertheless, decided that “Saigo no toki,” as a story narrating an ideal wife who at a certain moment of her life comes to a realization that being a “good wife” brought her nothing but discontent and disappointment, would best serve the goals of my thesis.

Even though this approach apparently was incapable to represent the entire palette of Japanese female fiction, it was methodologically acceptable and allowed me to make assumptions valid enough to build my argumentation upon. I believed that these works, on one hand, had played an important role in Japanese women’s literature and, on the other hand, in one or another
form had to have reflected the themes, moods and concepts that were most dominant in the Japanese society of the time, including “ryōsai kenbo.” And for that reason they could serve as a reliable criterion to compare Ōba Minako’s works to answer the second question of my thesis. This question was whether this writer’s philosophy of the feminine was indeed, as it seemed to me, an extraordinary phenomenon having no analogues in the Japanese women’s literature of the 1960s, or whether it was a part of the mainstream literary process.

My thesis consists of three chapters. Chapter one is a very brief overview of the basic aspects of human sexuality, the genesis of the institution of marriage and family, and the social, religious and cultural roots of the subordinate status of women. It also includes a brief history of gender relations in pre-modern Japan and the evolution of those into the orthodoxy of the ‘ryōsai kenbo’ concept during the Meiji period, as well as the social legacy it left in Japan after the country’s defeat in the Pacific War, traces of which can be found almost forty years later.

The second chapter of my thesis deals with the texts of Ōba’s early stories, “The Three Crabs,” “Niji to ukihashi” and “Kōzu no nai e.” I analyze these writings through the prism of gender relations and women’s roles within the Japanese marital-familial system in order to conceptualize Ōba’s philosophy on these issues.

Chapter three briefly outlines the situation in women’s literature in Japan in the 1960s and discusses four pieces of the female fiction of that time—“Parutai” by Kurahashi Yumiko, “Evening Bells” by Harada Yasuko, “Pheasant” by Setouchi Harumi, and “The Last Time” by Kôno Taeko. My primary interest was to understand how these authors dealt with the issues of the feminine, marriage and family, and to compare their views with Ōba Minako’s philosophy.

The analysis of the mentioned above works showed that on the whole Japanese women writers of the 1960s clearly saw that the Japanese contemporary marital-familial system became not only outdated but also a serious obstacle on the way of the development of the new gender relations, confining Japanese women into the rigid constraints of the twin roles “good wife” and “wise mother.” However, all protagonists of the reviewed stories, even though unhappy with the status quo and in the search for a way to realize their dreams and fulfill their lives, either do not know in what direction they should go, or the solutions they come up with remain within the framework of the same ‘ryōsai kenbo’ orthodoxy. That means that the authors of these stories themselves were uncertain what social recipes should be implemented to improve the status of women and the situation in marital-familial relations. Only the heroine of Harada Yasuko’s “Evening Bells” intuitively feels that her road to the full self-realization lies aside from the dead end path of “ryōsai kenbo” and clearly declares her choice of freedom.

Therefore, I came to a conclusion, that between 1960 and 1968 (the year when Ōba Minako published her “The Three Crabs,” “Niji to ukihashi” and “Kōzu no nai e”), there was almost no other Japanese woman writer who could match Ōba’s radicalism and unorthodoxy of her views on the Japanese establishment and especially marital-familial system. At the same time, authors like Harada Yasuko, laid a groundwork, on which Ōba Minako’s revolutionary
philosophy emerged. However, unlike Ôba Minako, these writers, even though understanding what lay as the roots of the subordinate status of Japanese women, probably could not find enough courage to challenge the establishment demanding that the social practice be changed and the reactionary “ryôsai kenbo” dogma be consigned to oblivion.
Notes

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Ichirô Yahashi, Gojûnin no sakka [Fifty writers], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Aoyumisha, 1982).
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Nina Cornyetz, for example, merely mentions Ôba Minako as a worthy object of research, but does not elaborate on the subject.
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7 Orbaugh, "Ôba Minako and the Paternity of Maternalism."

8 Wilson, Gender Is Fair Game.

9 Hatta, 216-237.

10 Mizuta, 157-173.

11 Yahashi, 155-162.

12 Dômeki, 55-57.

13 Nakamura, 194.


15 Yahashi, 159.

16 This Kind of Woman, xvii.


20 Taeko Kôno, “Saigo no toki ” [The last time], Saigo no toki (Tokyo: Kodakawa shoten,
1975) 5-45.
21 Nakamura, 196; Yonaha, 261.
Chapter One

“Good wife, wise mother”. 
The fruits of social engineering

I believe that the political significance of the problem of sex is due to the fact that sex is located at the point of intersection of the discipline of the body and the control of the population.
Michel Foucault.¹

Women, blamed as the source of the destructive folly of love..., had to be wrested from the cosmos, or at any rate from the world of wickedness, and made safe for the dignity of marriage and tender motherhood, the basis of society.
The sacredness of the body and the need to exorcise passion account for the status of women.
Michel Rouche, historian.²

The concept “ryōsai kenbo” [good wife, wise mother] was articulated and brought into the social practice by the Meiji ideologues in the last decade of the 19th century and remained an official doctrine of the Japanese ruling elite till the very end of the World War II.

From the 1890s the establishment increasingly sought to reimpose traditional virtues and status on women. Given the difficulty of doing so in the face of dramatic economic and political changes, its success was substantial and long-lasting. Thirty to forty years after the Restoration the majority of Japanese, both men and women, still adhered closely to the Tokugawa ideal of a woman’s role, and the new orthodoxy tried to build on and reinforce conservative attitudes of this kind.³

It can be said, that, perhaps unlike any other projects of social engineering carried out by the Japanese government between the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the defeat in the Pacific War (1945), two events that became epochal to Japanese nation, the doctrine of “ryōsai kenbo” left indelible traces on Japanese society, consequences of which still can be seen even now, more than a hundred years later.

However, Meiji’s statesmen do not hold the priority as far as institutionalizing gender policy is concerned. What distinguishes them from other regimes of the 19th and 20th centuries is the consistency and meticulousness with which this gender policy was implemented.
The genesis of the institution of marriage and family is too difficult and complex a theoretical and historical problem to be discussed in detail here. However, because this theory plays a crucial role in developing my argumentation I'll touch here on its most general aspects.

As soon as a human society moves into the production era which allows it to acquire material possessions and, ultimately, accumulate wealth, property becomes the core sociopolitical issue regardless of the epoch or the particularities of an individual civilization. Property dramatically changes the whole palette of socio-economic relations, including gender relations, which enter the era of regulation by the institution of marriage and family, a function of property. The marital-familial system becomes a mechanism of building, multiplying, preserving and transferring property along the familial lineage, turning gender relations within marriage into an instrument of producing free workers who are essential to, at least, maintain the family business, to keep it alive, but who eventually turn into pretenders for the fruits of that business. Due to the rudimentary state of contraception until recently, sexual relations unavoidably resulted in childbirth. And because it is women's bodies through which this function is carried out, in the view of the ancients, the only way they could effectively control the birth-rate and regulate the number of children was to subordinate feminine sexuality to the needs of reproduction and put it into the constraints of maternity. And from that perspective it does not look so illogical that one of the cornerstone postulates of the marital-familial system proclaims it a crime for a married woman to be involved in extramarital relations which bring with them not so much ethical issues, as a potentiality of quite material consequences. Therefore, confining women's sexuality exclusively within the framework of marriage becomes a form of protection of the family lineage from illegitimate offspring. It also serves the ideological premises for developing the parameters of "honest wife" and "model mother" declared to be the supreme ideals through which the fulfillment of the (confined) feminine could be ultimately achieved.

The civilization of Athens became an epitome of this social model as far as the status of women is concerned. In a more or less similar way women were treated in China, India and other Asian cultures, while women in the ancient Egypt and Rome enjoyed a much higher degree of equality with men and economic freedom. However, it is after the world's leading religions—Christianity in the West, Islam in the Middle East and Buddhism and Confucianism in the East—had formed, that these concepts of the models of the feminine took the shape of ideological and juridical formulations that, over the ages until relatively recent times, dominated the systems of social morals and the law.

In Japan from the ancient times, in particular in the Heian era (794-1185), to the Edo period (1600-1868) women had a status of relative equality and some economic independence. Evidence of matrilineal descent and matriarchal authority in Japan predates the patriarchal family of the seventh century, and during the Heian period of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, husbands and wives held and disposed of property independently. Husbands would sometimes leave property to their wives, but wives generally left their property to their children. Property inheritance by
women in aristocratic classes was common until as late as the fourteenth century.9

Due to this quite high status of women in the Heian Japan, marriages at that time played an important role for the upper class as a means of moving along the corridors of power and obtaining lucrative positions within the court-bureaucratic structure. For the lower classes marriage, as a form of merging economic resources of two families, was a matter of survival. This is where the practice of treating marriage as kind of a business partnership between families derives from. However, over the centuries patriarchal authority began to play a dominant role in the marital-familial system in Japan, leading to subordination of women who had been gradually losing their economic rights, including the right of property inheritance, the basis of their economic independence. This process found its completion, when the ruling samurai class had finished forming the social organization of Japanese society according to the ie [stem family] system.10

In Edo Japan (1600-1868) the institution of marriage began to bear an economic rather than political function for the whole society, since the key to power was more and more associated with monetary and economic wealth, not merely with pedigree as it had been before.

By the mid-Tokugawa period the difference in role which formed the basis for subservience in the middle and upper classes had been rigidly defined within the Neo-Confucian-based official orthodoxy. During the course of the Edo period social values stressed by the ruling class filtered downwards through the other castes of society, and even among the peasantry the crucial importance of women’s contribution to agricultural labour couldn’t totally prevent the imposition of inferior status in a rigid family and community hierarchy. By the late Tokugawa period Japan was confirmed as a patriarchal society in which the stated functions of women were twofold: the perpetuation of the family line and the care and entertainment of men. Though mitigated by economic imperatives at the lower levels of the social structure, these two precepts were at least in part the ideal at all levels of society.11

One of the most influential Confucian scholars of the early Edo period, whose theory on the education of women remained instrumental throughout the Edo era, was Kaibara Ekken (1630-1714). In his Onna Daigaku [The great learning for women], designed as a guidance manual for upper-class young women he writes (punctuation as in the original):

More precious in a woman is a virtuous heart than a face of beauty
... The only qualities that befit a woman are gentle obedience, chastity, mercy, and quietness ...
A woman has no particular lord. She must look to her husband as her lord, and must serve him with all worship and reverence, not despising or thinking lightly of him. The great life-long duty of a woman is obedience. In her dealings with her husband, both the expression of her countenance and the style of her address
should be courteous, humble and conciliatory, never peevish and intractable, never rude and arrogant. ... Let her never dream of jealousy. If her husband is dissolute, she must expostulate with him, but never either nurse or vent her anger.\textsuperscript{12}

However, it was in the Meiji era (1868-1911) when Japanese leaders, facing the challenges of the country's modernization and building an industrialized economy and modern military to catch up with the West, took the legacy of the Neo-Confucianist social theories and brought those to the fullest logical implementation, building a finished system of detailed laws and regulations, and official ideology. The core of the sociopolitical structure of the Meiji state, designed by the ideologues Inoue Tetsujirō, Hozumi Yataba and others was the concept of “ie,” declaring the whole country one family-state.\textsuperscript{13} Family, household was regarded as the crucial source of bringing up law-abiding subjects, without whom those plans couldn't have been carried out—an indispensable condition of the nation's welfare as the whole.

Meiji educators drew elaborate distinctions between the character building missions of young men and women, especially in ... secondary schools. “Liberals” and “conservatives” agreed that the “duties of womanhood” (onna no honbun) destined the “weaker sex” to devote themselves to the home, as “good wives and wise mothers” (ryosai kenbo), while the “duties of manhood” (otoko no honbun) demanded that young stalwarts seek their fortunes in the outside world of politics and commerce. Accordingly, just as the spokesmen from women’s secondary education stressed the virtues of chastity, modesty, submissiveness, and good taste, the headmasters of the all-male middle and higher schools trumpeted the countervailing values of performance, unyielding determination, and fortitude. To be sure, ...“liberals” justified such sexual distinctions as a separation of spheres, each with a dignity of its own, whereas “conservatives” ...argued that the juxtaposition of publicly aggressive men with domestically submissive women serve the interests of the nation; that the sexual hierarchy within the family became...the “organic component” of the orderly state. Their differences notwithstanding, both [“liberals” and “conservatives”] contributed to a polarization of manliness and femininity and a privileging of social character over individual personality. And social character, in the form of feminine domesticity and masculine performance, supported the material and technological needs of Meiji civilization.\textsuperscript{14}

The subordinate position of women was transformed from accepted societal practice into the legally formulated “good wife, wise mother” doctrine. On one hand, this up-graded a little women’s status in the social hierarchy, inasmuch as it was necessary to make them capable of fulfilling their role in educating the younger generation into future compliant soldiers and loyal citizens. Yet, on the other hand, deprived of any constitutional rights and considered objects, not subjects, within the juridical system, women were left almost no alternatives to these two rigorously delineated twin roles of “good wife, wise mother,” and had no means to reform these roles.\textsuperscript{15}
The keystone of the political system, the Meiji Constitution of 1889, excluded women from any direct political participation, and other legislation prevented them from campaigning for change. ... A more pervasive restriction was embodied in the 1898 civil code, which became the legal foundation of the patriarchal family (ie) system in the pre-1945 period, and placed a woman firmly within the locus of the family. Every clause of the civil code relating to women reinforced their subordinate, subservient position in Japanese society. A woman had no independent legal status, but was treated as a minor; all legal agreements on her behalf were concluded by the male to whom she was subordinate—father, husband or son. She had no free choice of spouse or domicile. While women could, in theory, protest against this subordinate position in a non-political manner, to do so directly posed a challenge to the whole social orthodoxy on which the prewar Japanese state was founded. Women thus protested at their peril. Those who demonstrated non-conformist lifestyles or extra-marital sexual relationships could lay themselves open not merely to social opprobrium but to legal action.

Though women's inferior status, which remained unchanged till Japan's defeat in the Pacific War (1941-1945), did not deter them from joining various non-governmental groups, the latter, as a rule, functioned within the confines of the officially approved activities. Therefore, it can be said that on the whole the establishment always actively controlled and manipulated the women's movement through various methods including state-run organizations for women. One of the first such government creations was The Patriotic Women's Association, established in 1901 and having a membership of over one million as World War I was drawing to an end. By the late 1930s it claimed three million members. The National Defense Women's Association, formed in 1932 with the army's support, had about eight million members. It is obvious, that

These organizations were concerned not with women's rights, but with women's duties. Their task was the reinforcement of the patriarchal 'family state', and both became vehicles for the mobilization of the female population by the state for the purposes of war. They had a major impact on the lives of the majority...

In 1942 all official women's mass groups were united into the Greater Japan Women's Association. Membership in this organization was mandatory for all women over twenty; younger females were organized into the youth unions.

Even before the start of the China War in 1937 these groups had coordinated women in specific back-up functions, such as savings campaigns, civil defence and care for the wounded and bereaved. Such functions were extended under the exigencies of war and the new political structure.

These official women's organizations were also a major element in the 'spiritual' mobilization of the female population, and under the influence of the miscellany of ideas they propagated the ideal of Japanese womanhood was built
up into the ‘mother of the nation’....

Military priorities meant that women were important as the bearers of sons who would fight Japan’s wars. The sanctity of motherhood was enshrined in official statements and regulations as long as the situation permitted the luxury of such favorable treatment. All women were depicted as mother-figures and consolers of men fighting overseas or serving on the home front.21

Another form of control and an instrument of social engineering the regime had in its arsenal was ideological pressure on the population. This was heavily used during the wars. The propagandistic machine worked at full power, regularly sending out general and gender-specific mass campaigns designed to solve the wide range of problems the government was experiencing in its internal and foreign policy. An example of state propaganda, which served as a wartime campaign to increase the birthrate, was the catch phrase “umeyo fuyaseyo” (Have children! Boost the population!).22

Japan’s defeat in the Pacific War gave way to the process of democratization of the country’s political, economic and social structures initiated by the Occupation authorities whose ultimate goal was to dismantle the Japanese war machine and put an end to the feudal-patriarchal legacy of the Meiji state and introduce new, Western-style, laws and social organization. One of the most crucial and urgent tasks was the demolition of the ie, “the despotic samurai house system”23 which was the core of the Japanese pre-war government’s gender policy and the ideological basis of the subordinate status of Japanese women in the Meiji hierarchy. The Constitution of 1947, containing “provisions more advanced than those of the United States,”24 and the Civil Code of 1948, proclaimed the guarantees of sexual equality in Japan and granted women equal rights in marriage, education, employment and suffrage.25 Japanese females found themselves in a dramatically different juridical environment, opening new, heretofore unknown opportunities in private and social life. However, as a rule people tend to fear and resist changes due to the phenomenon of social inertia and attachments to the traditional, customary ways of living and life values. Japan was no exception. "The imposition of the reforms met with little outright opposition, but it was not to be expected that the old concepts of women’s role and status could be abolished by the stroke of a pen."26

Besides, as it was eight decades earlier, Japanese policymakers again faced the same challenge of rapid economic growth and the necessity of catching up with the United States and other developed countries. This time the country was faced with the problem of raising the national economy and industry from the ruins of the war, and one of the major priorities of the Japanese postwar cabinets was rebuilding the Japanese public into a stable and manageable society, a critical instrument in attaining those goals. That is why the Japanese ruling elite were reluctant to discard the formulae of social engineering of the Meiji state,27 which had, after all, achieved very persuasive results in this sphere, successfully shaping the Japanese nation into a submissive and dutiful populace ready to sacrifice their lives carrying out any imperial and governmental orders. The whole prewar orthodoxy of the “family-state,” including the ideology
of the traditional marital-familial relations with its postulate “good wife, wise mother,” seemed suitable to the new purposes of post-war, and were brought into social practice in many respects nearly intact, not counting some new democratic flavor.28

It is no accident that the forces of social progress made it a major priority to replace the old patriarchal traditions and customs—which had turned marriage and family into a stronghold of tyranny—with new, truly democratic, norms and practices. One of the leaders of the reformist movement, Kawashima Takeyoshi, a scholar of family law, wrote in the introduction to his 1948 conceptual book *Nihon shakai no kazokuteki kōsei* [The familial structure of Japanese society].

The greatest task presently facing the Japanese people is, needless to say, the democratization of our nation... The democratic revolution cannot overlook the family system, once an object of absolute faith for the Japanese race, nor can democracy be achieved if the family system is overlooked.29

However, overcoming social habits that drew their strength from centuries-long experiences and active nourishment by the propagandist efforts on the part of the establishment turned out to be a difficult task.

In the 1960s Japan achieved a spectacular economic success—from a country which lost in the war a quarter of its national wealth,30 and whose production facilities and transportation systems were mostly destroyed,31 it rose to a world leader in many industries and demonstrated a strong potential to become a centre of the world economy. Japan did not and could not create the phenomenon of the “economic miracle” alone: such external factors as America’s many-sided economic aid to, and political support of, Japan on the internal and international levels, and the economic boom occasioned by the Korean War, not only helped the country’s quick recovery but can be largely credited with jump-starting the economic growth and prosperity Japan has been enjoying since the 1960s until the recession of the 1990s. However, no matter how fortunate these circumstances were, they would not have led Japan to its remarkable fulfillment without the painstaking and enduring efforts of the Japanese people, and this is where “the traditional virtues of work, patience, and saving”32 played a major role. For the Japanese government and the country’s old-liners the economic success of the 1950s-60s marked a kind of triumph of Japanese traditional values which, combined with consistent propaganda and widespread popularization, brought desirable results in reviving in the Japanese populace the pre-war spirit of national superiority and perpetuating the conservative views.

...Any immediate postwar feelings of racial inferiority have long since disappeared. By the late 1960s, pollsters discovered that very few Japanese still persisted in any deference to the West, while nearly 50% expressed a sense of superiority.33

Needless to say, an integral part of the whole conservative doctrine was the same Meiji concept “good wife, wise mother.” Though it apparently no longer corresponded to the new social and
economic realities, the Japanese policymakers stubbornly held to this outdated concept which had been such an effective instrument of social engineering for almost six decades, utilizing the whole power of the state ideological machine. No wonder that even forty years after the demolition of the despotism of the prewar patriarchal order,

...social practice is far removed from legal possibilities and indirect discrimination is widespread....

To be a 'good wife and wise mother' has continued to be what is expected of the majority of Japanese girls. If a woman is content to have her aspirations and ambitions lie within this traditional sphere society will delegate to her considerable power....

Yet economic and social pressures and changes in their education and life cycle mean that more women than ever before find it impossible – and undesirable – to remain strictly within the domestic context for the greater part of their lives. Once a woman begins to harbour ambitions outside the household sphere she meets with social prejudice, economic disadvantage and, despite the constitution, legal obstacles.

Given the above evidence, I do not think it is an overstatement to say that the concept "good wife, wise mother" was not only alive in Japanese society in the late 1960s when Ôba Minako gave public life to her "antiheroines"–naughty girls, bad wives and unwise mothers–but was overwhelmingly dominant in the views of the Japanese public on the institution of marriage and the family and gender roles within it.
Notes


7 A good illustration of the early Christian views on the institution of marriage and family, for example, can serve the First Epistle to the Corinthians by the Apostle Paul. *KJV Gift and Award Bible* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000) 642.


More details on the stipulations of the Meiji Civil Code including those related to the gender relations and family can be found in Japan: A Modern History (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002. 256-259) by James L. McClain.

17 Ibid., 143.
18 Ibid., 145.
19 Ibid., 145-146.
20 Ibid., 148.
21 Ibid., 148-149.
23 Jansen, 747.
24 Ibid., 747.
26 Hunter, 150.
27 A good illustration of this fact can serve the following recollection of the post-war constitutional process by Matsumoto Jōji, the chair of Constitutional Problem Investigation Committee, “we thought we could handle the matter as we pleased. We even thought it might be all right to leave [the existing Meiji constitution] as it was.” (Dower, 351).
28 As Kumagai argues, “In reality, however, the stated ideals of equity and independence in the family have never been fully realized. Legislative change does not necessarily impact everyday life, and many of the unique aspects of the ie family system continue to pervade Japanese family and society. Thus, it is well to note that the Japanese family system today may not be truly modern; it contains elements of both tradition and modernity.” (Kumagai, 16-17).
29 Ochiai, 76.
32 Jansen, 730.
33 Buckley, 83.
34 Ibid., 92.
35 Hunter, 150-151.
Chapter Two

An overlooked rebellion

Frank stared at Yuri’s lower abdomen.
“In the twentieth century, pregnancy is not a symbol of fertility but of sterility and destruction, you know. In American literature this has been so since Faulkner, or maybe since Hawthorne.”
“I see. But that seems to be the case in any modern civilization. In our home, however, it’s a symbol of peace, I’d say,” Takeshi said.
Yuri winked at Frank, who said, “Isn’t it a sign of a coming revolution in your case, since your family is living a century ahead of the rest of us?” [emphasis added]
“I don’t see any sign of such unrest so far,” Takeshi said.

Ôba Minako, “The Three Crabs.”¹

Japanese writer Ôba Minako (1930-) was 38 years old when recognition came to her in 1968 as her story “The Three Crabs” was published in the June issue of the Gunzô magazine and received the Eleventh Gunzô Prize. Soon after that her work was awarded one of the most prestigious and desirable trophies, the 59th Akutagawa Prize, a literary award usually not given to first-time writers.*

It is hard to say when exactly Ôba Minako began expressing her thoughts, reflections and perceptions of the world around her in the literary form. Maybe, it had already started when she was in elementary school, for even then the young Minako knew that she wanted to become a writer,² but she must definitely have been in writing mode as far back as 1955,³ when, after long hesitations and doubts, she accepted the proposal of Ôba Toshio on the condition that their marriage not keep her from writing.⁴

I believe Ôba Minako’s decision to pursue the career of a professional writer required not

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* As Sharalyn Orbaugh writes, “The prize is meant to highlight the accomplishments of writers relatively mew to the literary world but nonetheless is often not awarded until several years into a writer’s career. Maruyama Saiichi, for example, Ôba’s co-winner, had been publishing actively for eight years before he won the Akutagawa Prize. Most winners in the postwar years have been nominated unsuccessfully at least once before being awarded the prize.” (Ôba Minako and the Paternity of Maternalism.” The Father-Daughter Plot. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press: 2001. 272).
only resolve and commitment that was not subject to compromise, but also great courage. In the
patriarchal Japan of the mid-50s the very act of writing by a woman challenged the political and
economic foundations of the society and "a wife writing stories was [considered] as someone
even more radical than a heretic." It is no surprise that it took Ôba Minako at least twelve
years before she made up her mind to publish one of the writings she had produced in the
process of the search for her literary and human self. "I decided, all of a sudden, to try to send
this manuscript ["The Three Crabs"] for a debut prize of a literary magazine I ran into by
accident," she writes in her essay 'Hôrô-suru mono no tamashii' [The spirit of a wandering
person]."

The overwhelming success of "The Three Crabs" encouraged Ôba to publish in the Gunzô
magazine two other works. "Niji to ukihashi" [The rainbow and a floating bridge], written
in 1967, appeared on the pages of the July issue, and "Kôzu no nai e" [Picture with no
composition], which she had finished as far back as 1963, was printed in October. The result
turned out to be far beyond Ôba’s wildest dreams and expectations—not only did it launch a
literary career that has become one of the most brilliant and enviable in post-World War II
Japanese women’s literature, but it also gave Ôba the way to publicize her extremely unorthodox,
even controversial philosophy, making her among the most radical and vocal critics of the
Japanese social establishment. Of course, it did not happen overnight—it took due time before
Ôba’s voice gained sufficient power to be heard not only in the closed literary circles (the
bundan) but by the general public as well. But it can be said, that after the bundan, though with
some reservations, had endorsed "The Three Crabs" as a work of a bright and very promising
talent, the rise of Ôba Minako as a prominent novelist and uncompromising social critic became
irreversible.

For the sake of this discussion it is worth dwelling, at least briefly, on the comments and
evaluations the members of the Gunzô and Akutagawa Prize Committees gave to Ôba’s story,
"The Three Crabs," in their essays.

The members of the Eleventh Gunzô Prize committee were Etô Jun, one of the leading
literary critics of the time, Noma Hiroshi, Ôe Kenzaburô and Yasuoka Shôtarô, who by that time
had already been acknowledged as influential figures of the Japanese literary scene.

Etô Jun begins his essay with an unreserved acclamation of Ôba’s story, writing "In the
category of shôsetsu ... Ôba Minako’s ‘The Three Crabs’ is decisively outstanding; from the
very beginning when I had read it, I decided it was a prize work." He finds some minor
shortcomings in the story, but these did not prevent him from concluding his essay with the
remark that "‘The Three Crabs’ is so good!"

Ôe Kenzaburô mostly pays attention to the particularities of Ôba’s style, composition
and literary methods, praising her talent, whereas Noma Hiroshi writes that it was the very

* Unless directed otherwise, all translations from Japanese sources are mine.
first time when all the members of the prize committee got so excited about a piece of literature. He added that this did not surprise him, for the story “The Three Crabs” did possess a tremendous power and was an outstanding work. “Ôba Minako is truly a writer”, he exclaims emotionally, “I think ‘The Three Crabs’ is a work of the highest class not only in Japan but in world literature.” He also holds a high opinion of the story’s style.

Yasuoka Shôtarô was the only member of the Gunzô Prize Committee who subjected Ôba’s work to a harsh criticism.

“The Three Crabs” is quite an unpleasant work. I have to say that again, but I don’t think that this novel’s author is the same “bright woman” as the protagonist. Her existence is not ideal at all—she merely accepts and performs, yet conscientiously, the role of a housewife in a society that is different to us. And how unpleasant it is that in our eyes she embodies a fantastic person of an ideal fantastic society!

The essays of the eleven members of the Akutagawa Prize committee in which they explained their choice of the winners are much shorter than those of the Gunzô Prize committee members; besides, they were far from consensus: some favored Ôba’s “The Three Crabs” while some believed that “Toshi no nokori” [The remains of the year] by Maruya Saiichi was the work that should be awarded the prize. Nevertheless, these essays, although short, deserve attention.

Mishima Yukio, Ishikawa Jun, Nagai Tatsuo and Nakamura Mitsuo give mainly positive critique to Ôba’s work, focusing on her talent and the literary merits of the story. Kawabata Yasunari seems to be very careful in expressing his opinion on “The Three Crabs,” avoiding comment on the most controversial moments of Ôba’s work. “We can say that [this story] just slightly touched the trends of ideas of the time,” he writes vaguely in his essay.

Takii Kôsaku interprets “The Three Crabs” as some kind of an indictment of an “alien” society, writing, “I read this story for the first time. I felt well the boredom, tedium, solicitude and suicidal depression of a person living abroad.” A little bit further in his essay he continues, “How awful is the life of all these Americans and other nationalities as shown in these two shôsetsu [“The Three Crabs” and “Niji to ukihashi”], who are like a rootless grass!”

Of a greater interest to my discussion are the essays of Funabashi Seiichi and especially Niwa Fumio. Though Funabashi highly appreciates some parts of Ôba’s work, on the whole he thinks that “The Three Crabs” is just an ordinary story. “However, a good point about this is that through the fact that a Japanese [woman] living in America is not loved by her Japanese [husband] and the protagonist herself is bad, we can see the author’s true face,” he concludes his writing.

As for Niwa, he also, like the majority of the Prize committee members, examines the story’s style and composition, but at the same time he is quite articulate in his intolerance to the fact that the protagonist does not suppress her sexuality as it would be expected according to the
accepted social norms and morals, but, on the contrary, claims her inalienable right to seek the utmost fulfillment in all spheres of her life, including sexuality.  

So this is how Ôba's "The Three Crabs" was received by the most eminent Japanese writers in 1968. There is no denying that they possessed enough experience and literary expertise to see a promising talent in the first-time writer and at least understand the core philosophic values of this beginning author. However, in the case of Ôba Minako, it appears they were somewhat shortsighted and failed to recognize the fearless rebel who would dare not only to question ahead of her time the rigid social and moral dogmas, but openly and uncompromisingly challenge them, becoming a part of the forceful motion that would eventually bring Japanese society to a change.

It is known that by the time Ôba decided to compete in the Eleventh Gunzô Prize she had manuscripts of at least three finished stories—"Kôzu no nai e" [Picture With No Composition] (1963), "Niji to ukihashi" [Rainbow And A Floating Bridge] (1967) which with "Nomi no ichi" [The Flea Market] make a trilogy,22 and "The Three Crabs." But she chose "The Three Crabs" to send to the Gunzô Prize committee, and it seems no accident. It is difficult to speculate how her literary career would have turned out, had it not been "The Three Crabs" but one of the other two works. One thing is clear: her start as a professional writer might have been delayed for a long time.

I assume that Ôba might have her reasons for familiarizing the Japanese reading public with her works in such a sequence—first "Niji to ukihashi" and then "Kôzu no nai e"—and therefore I'll discuss these works in the same order as their appearance on the pages of the Gunzô magazine. However, to make it easier to follow the story lines of "Niji to ukihashi" and "Kôzu no nai e," I will combine them into one narrative where "Kôzu no nai e" comes first and "Niji to ukihashi" follows. As far as Ôba's philosophical concepts are concerned, I will follow the same order as the author chose in publishing her early stories, which means that I will discuss "Niji to ukihashi" first and "Kôzu no nai e" second.

"The Three Crabs" begins with a scene where a woman named Yuri walks along a seashore one misty morning. She is going to the bus stop to take a ride to town. When the mist gets thinner in the light of the rising sun she sees a blinking neon sign that reads "The Three Crabs". From the dialogues and some details it becomes clear that the story takes place somewhere in North America.

In the next scene, which describes the evening of the previous day, Yuri is at home, busily preparing for the bridge party. But she does not feel like hosting the party and openly says that to her husband Takeshi who is not happy about his wife escaping this routine socializing event. The dialogues between the spouses leave no doubts that they are on very uneasy terms and the threshold of infidelity has been passed long ago. After the majority of the picturesque guests has arrived, Yuri, with a hardly credible excuse, leaves the house.

However, she has nowhere to go and she decides to kill some time in an amusement park.
There she meets a man who in the story goes by the name "Pink Shirt." The rest of the evening Yuri spends with Pink Shirt in the park and later he takes her to a seashore inn, "The Three Crabs," to stay for a night.

I believe that it was clear to Ôba Minako that the very story line narrating the sexual adventures of a Japanese housewife and mother of a ten-year-old daughter in a foreign country was going to sound, to the most conservative part of Japanese society, as an outrageous heresy, a slap in the face of the social morality. Hereby using "The Three Crabs" as a touchstone to test whether the Japanese literary establishment and the reading audience were ready for her ideology of gender radicalism, Ôba avoids making explicit declarations of her unorthodox philosophy of the feminine. Only in one scene of the story, when Yuri has left the party and is followed by Rhonda, a friend of hers, who seems to want to say something important to her, does the author allow her views on womanhood to find an explicit expression through the protagonist’s discourse.

Following Yuri to the car, she [Rhonda] then whispered, "I'm going to Chicago tomorrow. Maybe I'll stay with the engineer..."

"You should do what you want to. You are still young and you don't have to try to catch a man [emphasis added]. You have your own life, which isn't going to be easily disturbed by others. You ought to do whatever you like and enjoy yourself. But Rhonda, love is treacherous. You won't be satisfied if your man is only gentle and kind, but if he's the clinging type, he'll become a burden to you."23*

Then Yuri continues, "You have your own life. Even if you did fly from Chicago to Paris and had a good time for a week, your life would still be here, just as it was – your two children, your job as a teacher, and Frank too."24

Although Ôba Minako seems to be really careful in not letting her most avant-garde concepts appear in the very first work she was going to publicize, the very personality of the protagonist turned out to be a perfect manifestation of Ôba’s unconventional beliefs. Practically at the beginning of the story it becomes clear that Yuri has been involved in extra-marital affairs and that fact is not even a secret to her husband. When Yuri tells him that she is not going to be with the guests at the bridge party, Takeshi says, “You’ve slept with Mr. Stein, so you are eager to be a go-between for him and Rhonda.”25 Some narrator’s comments make it clear that Mr. Stein was not the only lover Yuri had had. “The chain...had been a birthday present from a

boyfriend three years ago; she still thought fondly of him." And, of course, Ōba Minako audaciously challenges the social norms of Japan of 1960s by making her protagonist capable of picking up, as a sexual partner, a total stranger she just has met in an amusement park.

It’s interesting how Michiko Wilson, a scholar of contemporary Japanese literature, interprets this incident in her quite comprehensive monograph on Ōba’s works Gender Is Fair Game.

When Pink Shirt starts making love to her [Yuri] in his car, Minako seems to be reversing sexual politics. It is pointed out that men’s sexual relationships with “bad” women “stabilize” marriages in Japan. In this story it is a woman who “abandons” the family and picks up a man to keep a boring marriage intact. However, it is not a simple reversal of “roles”. Yuri is totally passive. She lets Pink Shirt make love to her: consensual sex without sexual passion or lust.

No matter how shocking Yuri’s behavior might have seemed to a conservative reader, her personality is far from being ordinary. Through her dialogues with Takeshi and the guests of the bridge party one can see an intelligent, articulate and confident, yet too sensitive woman full of erotic charisma, making remarks filled with delicate irony, sarcasm and hints of sexual suggestions.

“Don’t you feel like consoling me, Frank? A woman who’s being treated like this by her husband?” [Yuri says.]

“Yes, I do.”

“Go right ahead,” Takeshi said. “But I can’t let both of you go tonight, since we need a certain number of people to play bridge. Try some other time.”

“Takeshi, you ought to realize that insulting your wife in public can affect the amount of alimony,” Yuri said solemnly.

When her eyes met Takeshi’s, Yuri moved her body close to Yokota and whispered to him in Japanese while giving Mrs. Yokota a sincere, pleasant smile.

“Mr. Yokota, you are a true poet. Frank is a Faulkner scholar but he’s not as poetic as you are,” Yuri said. She felt something like a yawn bubbling up from the bottom of her stomach along with the meaningless words she had just spoken. “I wonder how much easier my life would be if I weren’t so sensitive to gentlemen’s charms,” she continued nevertheless.

Yuri is also not devoid of sexual experimenting—she used to have a very intimate friendship with “a hint of lesbianism” with her roommate in the university dormitory.

However, the protagonist is not just a married woman, who, in the process of exploring
her feminine self, experiments in the area of eroticism and sexuality. She has a child, a ten-year-old daughter Rie, and this fact should have been especially appalling in the view of the social moralists. The issue of the relationship between Yuri and her daughter as mother-daughter dyad is discussed in depth in an essay by Sharalyn Orbaugh, “Ôba Minako and the Paternity of Maternalism,” which makes it unnecessary to go into detail in my argumentation, yet I’d like to elaborate on some points which I think are relevant for my discussion.

It is only three times that we encounter Yuri’s daughter throughout the story. For that reason, the picture of the relationship between the mother and daughter is quite fragmentary and does not allow us to draw categorical conclusions. Yet, some assumptions still can be made. Almost from the very beginning of the story it becomes clear that relations between Yuri and Rie are complex and extremely uneasy. We see Yuri cooking the treats for the bridge party. She does not feel well and tells Rie that sometimes she feels like there is no one in the world to whom she can be frank and candid. In such moments Rie is the only person she would like to share her true thoughts with. Yuri continues that, for example, she hates Sasha and she hates the cookies she has to bake for the guests. Then, suddenly, she slips down to a self-humiliating tone, “When Mommy says something strange, you just listen to it and let it go as Mommy’s foolishness. Mommy might be stupid, but you should feel sorry for her too, so you be nice to her once in a while.”

Here Takeshi cuts into Yuri’s conversation with Rie and Rie becomes an involuntary listener to her parents discussion. “Listening to her mother Rie thought her mother was disgusting when she talked like this and felt sorry for her father. She was only ten but was a precocious child, and could understand most adult conversations.”

The second scene where Rie interacts with her mother in the story is when she comes to the bathroom where Yuri is putting on makeup after speaking with Takeshi and deciding that she will leave as soon as the guests have come.

Feeling better since she had decided not to play bridge, Yuri decided to put on some makeup. She was putting on eyeliner in front of the bathroom mirror when Rie came in and said in a tone that sounded like a school principal’s, her hands clasped behind her back,

“You want to look young, don’t you, Mommy?”
“That’s right. All women do.”
“But since everyone knows that I’m your daughter, they’re not going to believe you’re under thirty, for sure.”
“Some women have a child at sixteen.”

“Those kind of girls aren’t nice [emphasis added].”

And the last time Rie appears in the narration is at the very end of the story, when Yuri is driven by Pink Shirt to the hotel “The Three Crabs” at the seashore after everything that has happened during the day. Yuri, looking into the car’s window, thinks of Frank’s nose, Sasha's
thick lips, and Mrs. Yokota and a thought of Takeshi and Rie comes into her mind. She then thought of Takeshi’s voice, which sounded like a piece of aluminum being flexed, and of Rie’s voice, with its brassy ring, saying, “Humph, nice girls don’t do that.” [emphasis added] Somehow both father and daughter had the same metallic voices.35

It might seem paradoxical, but ten-year-old Rie turns out to be the only character in the story who serves some kind of a medium of the traditional, conservative views, though in childish interpretation, on the feminine. From the narration it becomes clear that Rie learns what is right and what is wrong in life, including the gender roles, not from her mother, to whom she supposedly should relate as the very first role model to follow, but her father. It is hard to say what agenda Yuri is holding and what goals (if any) she is pursuing regarding her daughter. It could be that she is actively trying to bring about in Rie an understanding of the nature of the feminine the way Yuri sees it: free from the obligations society created for the sole purpose of maintaining the social status quo, free from the perpetuation of women’s social servitude; an understanding that a woman has a right to strive for her own happiness without sacrificing her life to social dogma. Or, it could also be that Yuri hopes that over time all the pieces of the puzzle of womanhood will come together for Rie, and Yuri’s own life will then make more sense, so at this point it will not do much good to prematurely push Rie on a subject she is too young to fully comprehend. In any case, one thing is quite clear: Yuri is not in the winning position in the battle with her husband for Rie. It is Takeshi whose views on motherhood Rie has adopted and through which she regards and judges her mother whether she is doing “right” or “wrong.” And because Yuri, in her exploration of new territories of the feminine, breaks the constraints of the rigidly proscribed roles of “the wife” and “the mother,” which makes Takeshi “unhappy” and “disappoints” Rie’s expectations, she “deserves” nothing but the girl’s reproach as “a bad, unwise mother,” resulting in alienation between the two women.

“Niji to ukihashi” (1967), as far as the plot is concerned, is quite a plain story describing a very short period of life of the protagonist. It does not narrate any special events that could have made it a captivating reading. At the same time, narration is complex and multi-layer, the language is intelligent and expressive employing delicate and poetic images and metaphors. In some parts of the story, the protagonist’s inner monologues get interwoven with the plot’s current, storytelling and author’s ideas, and it makes the narrative especially ambiguous and intricate.

However, as I wrote earlier, first will come the outline of “Kôzu no nai e” which was created four years before “Niji to ukihashi” and makes the first part of the trilogy about Saki Morita.

In “Kôzu no nai e” Saki is twenty eight years old, single and she studies at an American university in the early 1960s (from the references in the story to some political and international events that took place in that period it follows that it must be the year of 1962 or 1963; besides, it is known that Ōba Minako wrote this story in 1963 while studying at the University of Wisconsin36).

The story begins with a scene at a class on ancient sculpture. While waiting for the
instructor, Professor Victor Bowman, the students are discussing the latest university news. Saki is in the class too, but she hardly participates in the conversation, mainly listening to what the others say. She studies fine arts, and sculpture is not a mandatory subject of her program but nevertheless she takes it for she seems to like Professor Bowman.

The following part introduces Gaku Hamana, a Japanese exchange student, who is taking a Masters’ program at the same university. Gaku sees Saki on campus and hears various quite “disturbing” rumors about her relationships with several American students and an affair with a university professor. He only manages to meet her at a student party where she is with her boyfriend, a talented fine arts graduate student and promising artist, Daniel Duval. Saki is in love with Daniel and would like to marry him but it looks like their relations do not go very much to Saki’s liking.

One of Saki’s classmates, a young black man named Ed, is not happy about the way he is doing at the university and decides to move to another place, presumably somewhere in the South. Things are not going well there and in a state of emotional breakdown he kills his pet cat Princess.

The succeeding part of the story narrates in some detail the love affair between Saki and Professor Victor Bowman. Victor is married and has a child, but wants to divorce his wife and marry Saki. During their stay at a motel on their way to another town they have a very candid conversation and Saki tells Victor that she does not see herself as Victor’s wife. She confesses to him that she is intimate with Daniel and they have even touched the issue of marriage. Victor is devastated: he says that he is deeply in love with Saki and wants to be her slave.

In the next scene, Saki and Daniel are at the lake. Suddenly, Daniel calls Saki a slut and accuses her of dishonesty and promiscuity and of being la femme fatale, playing with men’s lives and hurting them so much that they cannot recover. Offended Saki wants to break up with Daniel and forget about him.

Saki is back in dormitory where she has a conversation with Gaku. Gaku makes a try to offer himself as Saki’s prospective husband—although Saki is sarcastic, she does not turn down Gaku’s proposal, but makes it clear that even if she marries Gaku she cannot stop seeing Daniel whom she loves so much.

In the subsequent part, Victor again sees Saki and tells her that he wants to marry her. But Saki refuses him, saying she is incapable of becoming the wife Victor expects her to be. He accuses her of deceiving him, but Saki replies that she has never promised Victor to marry him. Their relationship is over.

In the following scene Saki is in her dormitory room. Here comes a phone call from Gaku who is drunk and makes Saki an official proposal, saying that as proof he has bought an engagement ring for her. Saki accepts Gaku’s proposal and suggests that they throw an
engagement party at the church, but Gaku says that they should not do so because then she will not be able to sleep with other men any more. He hangs up, and Saki remains alone with her thoughts realizing that Gaku’s proposal might be her last chance “to catch a husband.”

“Niji to ukihashi” narrates Saki’s life seven years later after the events of the first story. She is married to Gaku, but her feelings for Daniel Duval are still alive. Most likely Saki and her husband live in the state of Washington.

The story begins with the scene where Gaku is going salmon fishing and begs the reluctant Saki to keep him company. Saki gives up and when they are on the boat she suddenly emotionally breaks down and says that she wants to go back to Japan, asking Gaku to give her a thousand dollars to pay for the ticket. Gaku decides that she needs a change in her life and suggests she take a summer art course at the state university.

So Saki goes to the university and meets there Chico, a young student from Salvador, who becomes her boy friend and lover. She also makes friends with Fred and Yoshiko—a married German-Japanese couple who are studying at the university too—and socializes with them quite a lot. Fred and Saki share much sympathy for each other, but Saki does not let it grow into an intimate relationship for she believes Fred’s wife Yoshiko will not be happy about this affair. Although Saki associates with many other people on campus and even develops very close relations with some of them, she spends a lot of time reflecting about her life and feeling sadness and loneliness, for she is badly missing Daniel whom she has not seen for about six years. She still deeply loves him and would give anything to meet him again.

Saki discovers that one of the summer courses is taught by Brent Winters who used to be married to Daniel’s mother. Saki is seeking a chance to meet with Brent for she hopes to learn from him about Daniel. She regularly sees him in the university dining hall and one day approaches him. They have quite a lengthy conversation about life, marriage, families, but she cannot find courage to ask him about Daniel. She keeps telling herself that she must ask Brent about Daniel but cannot bring herself to say anything.

Only in the morning of the very last day when Saki is flying back to Japan, determined not to leave until she learns about Daniel she goes to the dining hall to see Brent. Again they talk about various insignificant things and Saki feels like daydreaming—debris of thoughts are flashing through her mind. Finally, she takes all her courage and suddenly asks Brent about Daniel, his second wife’s son. Brent simply replies that Daniel died—he and his girl friend were killed in a car accident two years ago. Saki is stupefied and devastated by the news. Then along comes Debbie, her roommate, and tells her that there is an urgent phone call for her.

Saki returns to her room. It is Chico on the phone calling her from a police station—he has been arrested by the police for driving without a driver’s license and possession of alcohol in his car. It is Chico’s second police incident and he must pay a three hundred dollar fine to be released. He hopes that Saki will help him out, but she does not give him any particular answer.
Chico hangs up, and Saki after a brief thinking calls the airline and cancels her ticket to Tokyo.

“Niji to ukihashi” was reviewed by Sata Ineko, Aoyanagi Mizuho and Yasuoka Shôtarô, and their discussion was published in the August issue of the Gunzô magazine. Sata Ineko gave a brief account of the story’s plot saying that in her view this story was about the unbearable life of a Japanese housewife in a foreign country, and highly praised Óba’s talent. Yasuoka Shôtarô expressed his opinion that the heroine was trying to free herself from a situation in which no one was restraining her. He also compared Óba’s story to Kafû’s “Amerika monogatari,” noting that, unlike the former, the latter was mainly focused on the things in the United Stated that were exotic to the Japanese public at that time. The most negative in his opinion about the protagonist was Aoyanagi Mizuho. He argued that she was a foolish woman with an unsatiable desire who loved men and was ready to sleep with anybody. On the whole, he said, the story was about the solitude of a Japanese housewife living in a foreign country. It is worthy of note, that Sata Ineko also once displayed her shock at the protagonist’s “loose” behavior, stressing that Saki did not hesitate much to go into an intimate relationship with Chico. However, all participants of the discussion agreed that “Niji to ukihashi” was different from any other works written by Japanese authors who visited or stayed in other countries for just a short period of time, and from that perspective the story was of great literary value.

I think if one were to compare “Niji to ukihashi” to “Kôzu no nai e” it can be said that the former is much less used by Óba Minako to deliver her philosophy of the feminine and her views on the institution of marriage and family than the latter. Nevertheless, the author’s concepts can be found in “Niji to ukihashi” in quite an explicit form not only by the means of the narration and the story line, as is the case with “The Three Crabs,” but also as unreserved proclamations through protagonist’s attitude, her conversations and thoughts.

So, Saki has been married to Gaku for seven years and all this time she has still thought about Daniel. She cannot forget him, for she still loves him with all her heart and she believes that with him any life would be a blessing. If only Gaku would let her go, she would return to Daniel. Marriage had always been the least desirable option for Saki, but she agreed to marry Gaku only under the pressure of the circumstances—she had been rejected by Daniel and she had refused a proposal from her another lover, the young university professor Victor Bowman. Yet, after seven years of marriage she is less radical in her denial of this social institution. Here’s what Saki says to Daniel in her thoughts. “No matter how we despise the system of marriage, what other way is there after all? … Isn’t there the majority who thinks that eventually in these days’ world marrying is so convenient and not so bad at all?”

Saki’s sentiments about marriage become more or less complete when she speaks with Brent Winters, telling him that she is going back to Japan. Brent takes this situation as a sign that Saki has serious troubles in her marriage and recommends that she think of divorce as an option. Saki explains to him her view on her marriage and the issue of separation with Gaku.

Well, probably divorce doesn’t make much sense to me. Even now we live
selfishly, and, besides, even though I am married, I don’t feel much that I am not free. I think that because I am called a wife, I perhaps ought to think about my husband in a positive way. But the problem is that I have too strong a curiosity only about my own interests. That’s why it looks like indeed it would be better if we split.43

It is an interesting evolution of Saki’s attitude toward her marriage. In the middle of the story where Saki is at the heights of her relationship with Chico, she does not consider leaving her husband. Why? Because, though for Saki this affair is first of all another phase in the never-ending process of her self-exploration, she, at the same time, regards it as a means to keep her dying marriage alive. This is similar to the protagonist of “The Three Crabs,” who, as Michiko Wilson notes, exercises adultery to escape from the boredom and monotone routine of her spousal life:44 ”Again, I can have an affair with this more than ten years younger man, and then I can return to my husband,’ Saki thought.”45

The fact that Saki indeed may look very easy, even loose in the way she becomes involved in extra-marital sexual relations, does not mean that she practices promiscuity. Erotic pleasure, though being a powerful force behind her motivation, in essence, is not the only and ultimate goal she is trying to attain in her relationships. ”What I need from you is just your male charm,” she confesses to Chico, and then continues:

I love men and I am a foolish woman whose head goes dizzy at the charm men possess and we women lack. I am a woman who is chasing men expecting from them the ability full of ambition to act toward creation of order and harmony, despite the primitive combative spirit, animal desire and destructiveness [only] men have,... the ability you are supposed to have. A heavy responsibility, Chico, right? So it is—to have the power to give life to a woman.46

Yet, Saki sounds rather discriminating when she explains to Chico why his, not somebody else’s, “male charm” found a response in her heart:

You ask me if I am interested in you. I think I am. When you called me, didn’t I came [to you] without any hesitations? I am always rebellious and fickle, so when you began telling me about revolution, I thought at once “this is it.” I see nothing else but the core essence of men; that’s why the fact that you were a straight ‘A’ student at the famous Y university adds nothing to your sexual glamour, but when it came to revolution, you became to me even more attractive.47

This same attitude can be seen in Saki’s relations with Fred. She does hold herself back from going into an affair with him, but not for the reason that he lacks “sexual glamour” that could catch her interest. On the contrary, Saki likes him a lot and there is a high charge of eroticism between them when they get together. Saki restrains herself in that relationship, because she feels that if she becomes intimate with Fred, it will make Yoshiko unhappy, and
Saki, notwithstanding her ultimate faithfulness to the philosophy of an unlimited freedom in expressing her ego, follows a strong rule that her pursuit for erotic pleasures should not hurt other people.

If you think about it, there is not even the slightest reason for a woman, who sees no crime in having an affair with a man other than her husband, to avoid somebody who has a wife, but because this man's wife wouldn't welcome that, for Saki the troubles [it could cause] went ahead of her own interests. To Saki, not hurting other people with her behavior was the only thing that was still making sense as a moral criterion and for that reason she didn't feel like making Yoshiko unhappy.48

Apparently, Saki looks at her husband through the same prism of "erotic glamour" and either he has lost that a long time ago, or he never had it in the first place: in any case, Gaku does not spark any interest in Saki, she has no feelings for him and she cannot help it. Comfortable and convenient life with a person she does not love is empty, and incapable of bringing her happiness and saving her married life from disappointment, and this is what she is trying to explain to Gaku in her inner monologue:

I am sorry, Gaku. I am a sinful woman. I don't have any interest in your friends and in the conversations of the people around you. Even more than your making me eat mackerel barbecue in the time of morning sickness, I can't stand these once a week dinners with the families of your university colleagues, and the chit chat at the bridge parties of the university women's society which is like the preaching of a Roman Catholic priest.49

That is why in the scene on the fishing boat when she emotionally breaks down she begs Gaku to let her go so that she can draw a line in this marriage she can no longer put up with.

... That's enough. Look, I want to go back to Japan. Fish... I cannot live [like that] any longer. Listen, I need a thousand dollars. I want to go back to Japan. No more fish. I need people...

... Why don't you kick me out? All the time I sleep with other men, I have no interest whatsoever in the world you live in, why do you hold on to a wife who wants nothing but to see foolish dreams and wander around?... you are always a splendid, impeccable husband, and I am an unfaithful, bad wife who, naturally, deserves to be thrown out.50

Gaku, though he seemingly does not fully accept the unconventionality of Saki's life principals, perfectly understands their origin—an extreme manifestation of the search for her true self and an absolute freedom—and it looks as if he has managed to find a way to adapt himself to the unorthodoxy of her life philosophy. In his view, her attitude is self-destructive, for society is incapable of appreciating her and she simply will fall a victim of her own radicalism.
A woman like you, if she were kicked out, would go from one man to another, and all she’ll finally end up with will be dying in a mental ward of a charity hospital or something like that. And in such a place no matter how much you had been worshipping men, not one of those you used to embrace with all your might will come to your rescue. If you want to leave, go ahead. I am just a person who thinks it’s bad to destroy your life with my judgements.

On the whole, “Niji to ukihashi” shares some level of similarity with the renowned “The Three Crabs” in the tone and imagery. Besides, it is also worth noting that several details described in “Niji to ukihashi” found their way into “The Three Crabs.” These are the reference to Saki’s morning sickness, bridge parties she cannot stand any more, and the infidelity of the both spouses, which is no longer a secret between them and to which they resort in order to maintain their marriage intact. It allows us to conclude that, even though “Niji to ukihashi” has an indisputable value as a stand-alone piece of literature, it also might have served as some kind of a writer’s laboratory where Ōba Minako was doing her literary experiments and polishing her art of narration before coming up with the masterpiece “The Three Crabs.”

“Kōzu no nai e” was the last story Ōba Minako published in Gunzō magazine in 1968. Compared to “The Three Crabs” and “Niji to ukihashi,” “Kōzu no nai e,” written five years earlier, turned out to be even more radical. The writer’s unconventional philosophy of the feminine was declared openly, even bluntly, with no disguise behind the sudden and captivating turns of the plot or the delicate hints of the elaborate dialogues. It seems that not only did Ōba Minako not avoid controversy, but she audaciously threw a glove of challenge to the literary establishment and the social status quo.

However, the panel discussion of the story between Enchi Fumiko, Nakamura Shin’ichirō and Miura Shûmon, which was published in the November issue of the Gunzō magazine and can be regarded as the very first, yet brief, critique of this work, mainly revolves around the story’s plot, and not one of the panelists even cursorily mentions the unparalleled radicalism of Ōba’s philosophy. For example, Enchi Fumiko says that in her view “Ōba created a soft and pleasant language,” but finds it difficult to conceive the protagonist’s personality, thinking that at its roots it is not even nihilism but something even deeper and she cannot define it exactly; Nakamura Shin’ichirō points out that some parts of the story, like the scene where one of the characters kills his pet cat, are difficult for Japanese readers; and Miura Shûmon thinks that on the whole “Kōzu no nai e” is a good sketch of contemporary American university life. I agree with Nakamura that as far as plot is concerned, this novel is not something really extraordinary.

It follows from the account of the story’s plot, however brief, that the protagonist does not seem to be a typical Japanese young woman of the early 1960s. She is independent, smart, and strong (Victor Bowman, when Saki declines his marriage offer, says that she is much stronger than American women and compares her with a panther); she knows what she wants in her life and her relationships with men, not humbling herself as she is expected to do according to the
accepted social norms and morals, for she feels equal to men and, like a man, she values her freedom and does not restrain herself in pursuing her love and expressing her sexuality. These characteristics can be illustrated by the following citations and passages from the story.

When Gaku meets Saki for the very first time in the student dormitory, Saki gives him an evaluating look and, seeing that his pants are not pressed well, remarks sarcastically that the man must be a dandy. Saki catches Gaku’s interest and, intrigued, he hears various scandalous stories about her.

Sometimes quite shameful rumors about that female student reached his ears. That she seduced a young American—it was an instructor from the same department she was in—he was married and had a child and had no choice but to choose divorce. That she was swimming naked all night with other arts students—beatniks at the university’s camp in the canyon. And so on [of this kind].

Gaku sees Saki at the student party: Saki is singing along with the guitar accompaniment by her boyfriend. Here is her first conversation with Gaku:

“Ah, well [look who’s here]! Teacher,” said the female student. “How many people want to become a teacher! He is becoming a teacher too,” said the female student with her chin on the shoulder of the student who was playing the guitar.

“I heard your other lover is a teacher too.”...

The female student deeply laughed and looked back at him.

“Well, well, if you are so good at gathering information this way, you should become a reporter. It will suit you very much. Though, why did you make a vow not to become a lover of mine?”

At the end of the story Victor Bowman meets with Saki and asks her to marry him, but Saki does not accept his offer. Long before he popped the question, Saki thought about getting married in America, which on one hand looked very attractive, for that could be a solution to her many problems and bring her a comfortable and cushy life, but the question was whether or not that was the life she was longing for.

[Saki] thought about her age—27 years old. She didn’t think that her appearance had lost its youth, but she also felt that it was going away fast especially remembering the limits of the human's life. She tried again to think over the fact that it wasn’t the first time she pondered that it would the easiest thing—before she reached the age when she had to bluff—to find and marry a guy here [in America] who would provide for her. If it were Victor, would he become closer to her even if she turned her eyes down with all her might? Would robins come to their home, even if there were a back yard with a lawn, apple trees, marguerites and primulas, pansies and lupine blooming along the hedge?

She thinks that if she marries Victor, she will have to give up her own life and sacrifice the dreams
and ambitions she cherishes to achieve, playing not hers, but somebody else's role scribbled according to the social norms and morals she at large does not acknowledge and does not accept. And this is what she candidly says to Victor who wants to know why she refuses his proposal.

- That’s why. Didn’t I say that from the very beginning? I don’t feel like getting married and, besides, [you said] I am absolutely bad at house work. Why can we not just remain friends like we used to be before?
- Didn’t Gaku proposed to you to marry him?
- Looks like that.
- What do you mean, ‘Looks like that’? Did you give him the same answer you gave me now?
- Looks like that.
- So, what did he say?
- Well, he said, “Let’s live together. If it doesn’t work, you can leave.”

When later on Victor, disappointed and even devastated by her refusal, blames Saki for deceiving him, she parries, “You say that I’ve betrayed you. When did I promise to marry you? From the very beginning we never meant marriage. You didn’t even try to think about that when we started. And all the time you kept changing your mind in this matter.”

She does not mean that Victor is not a worthy man to marry; she says that any other woman would be more than happy to become his wife and live the life he is going to share with her. But it will be nothing more than marriage with its rules, norms and morals and this is not what Saki is striving for. In fact, it is far from her hopes, dreams and expectations from life. And this is exactly what Saki says to Victor.

... speaking from the general standards, I think you’ll make an impeccable husband, and if I had been crazy about marriage, I should have thanked you [for your proposal] with all my heart. But what I am saying to you is that I have nothing of what you are expecting from me; besides, it is you who said that I was not suitable for the wife's chores you would be demanding from me—like hanging the Japanese-style paper lanterns to the ceilings of the living rooms with a range [Victor wanted to start interior design business with Saki’s help], sitting on the silk floor cushion in a scarlet long underwear with a knee drawn up—I don't have the qualities to make this kind of dream of yours come true. I am just a little bit not up to this [task], so I can't play tricks on you.

The irony and Saki’s drama is that Daniel, the only person she really loves and who is close to her by his life values and his pursuit of the utmost self-expression, does not accept Saki’s quest for freedom. He does not understand that Saki is on a crusade against the trap women find themselves in after the bright wrappings of the idyllic pictures of harmonious marriages and happy families have been removed and the system of the social servitude which condemns women to a life of perpetual self sacrifice reveals its true nature. He takes her sexual
extremism and search for the ultimate feminine for the nymphomania of a promiscuous female and a sexual vampire and he bluntly accuses her of that.

...You are a born slut. You are a slut! Probably money is not what you are swindling men out of, but with your sexual tricks you are snatching away what they have, from one man after another. So, when you see that he cannot pay your the sky is the limit price you put just as you pleased, you abruptly turn away and sell it to somebody else.67

These are the major touches to the portrait of Morita Saki which by itself reveals the personality of la femme extraordinaire. However, in my view, of even greater interest are the radical ideas and views on female sexuality, marriage and motherhood the author puts into the mouth of her heroine. Although the following passages from the story are quite lengthy, they are worth citing in full, for they definitely look like a conceptual proclamation of a social rebel who fearlessly challenges the norms and morals the society had constructed around the feminine. Besides, the concepts laid out in this kind of a manifesto can be found in one or another form in Ōba's subsequent works and for that reason are very important.

As over time Saki began regaining her self-confidence, she started to despise men as something that ultimately could regard a woman only within a system. First, many men stupidly believed the myth that women in essence were different from men and their instinct was to pour out their self-sacrificing love to one man and to desire to give birth and rear children of this one and only man, which was absolutely wrong. How on earth could men possibly comprehend the puzzle of women's instinct? Saki was pretty much a conceited person, but she had realized that the mystery of men's instinct was absolutely beyond her comprehension. Her curiosity was strong, because she would never understand it, and she kept restlessly looking around for the answers. If somebody asked Saki about it she would say that women share a lot of similarity to men, and, if possible, women should try to have children from different men. However, it doesn't happen because there is no place in this society for doing so, and besides, sometimes women, like men, get tired, so they choose the easiest and safest route that doesn't hurt them. To some this is a smart, cunning and wise way. If a woman vows not to run away from her only man, the man, though reluctantly, will provide for her, and she, under the justice structure called the marriage system, can warn this one and only man she secured for herself, “Don’t even think of letting other women touch you!” However, each woman sends out to men her unique charm, and men possess their own charm that attracts women, so there is nothing that can be done about the fact that some people don’t buy this threat. To Saki it meant that Klee couldn't be boring just because Picasso was wonderful. And it couldn't be so that Kafka didn't appeal to her heart just because she gave all her faithfulness to Camus.

However, if she carelessly shouted that at the top of her voice, she would
be seized by her neck like a stray cat and fiercely thrown away into the ditch. After all, men work hard, with their whole hearts, and for that reason, if an idle woman who is doing nothing with her time would like to say something, even true, they would decide to pretend that this inconvenience doesn't bother them. That's why for Saki it was enough to be a loose, easy woman.68

However, Saki does not conceal her ideas. Not only is she quite "vocal" in manifesting her credo by the very way she lives, but when she speaks out she is also very articulate. This is what she says to Gaku when he asks her what she would think of having a husband like him:

I think, I feel like I'd love to live with you my whole life. But, even if I marry you, I can't stop seeing Daniel. He is marvelous. He is not someone I could live together with, but when he speaks, it's like he is piercing you through.

... After all, I just love men too much, I mean, like a so called 'easy woman'. Don't look at me as if you were saying, "Ah, here is such a slut."69

No less appallingly must Saki's revelations sound to Victor Bowman when she declines his marriage offer.

Victor looked right into Saki's eyes gloomily.
- You just wanted to see how it was to sleep with me, didn't you?

Saki's face lightened as a sunflower and she laughed.
- Don't buy the talk that women indeed want to embrace [a man] for the rest of their lives. If I were from the flesh league, I would wind myself into the chain you made, and, sobbing, stick fast to your bed. But because there was no chance to see the shine of your heart other than to sleep with you, I seduced you into bed.
- I see. So, in the same way, if you need to see the shine of a man's heart, you'll seduce any man into bed.
- Yes, if I like him, I'll seduce anybody. Whether it is a married man like yourself, or someone I decide to marry—it won't be the reason I shouldn't let my feelings out. Besides, isn't it so that you men usually think that you benefit from sleeping with a woman? Then why should I be restrained? Ah, well, probably you don't have the slightest desire to marry such a woman.

Saki was about to say, "I always do as I please, and it's a joy to create my own world together with you to make my dreams come true, but I cannot kill my dreams for the sake of yours," but she thought, "No need to hurt each other more," and didn't say anything.70

No matter how extreme Saki's philosophy of the socially unrestrained feminine may, by the end of the story she comes to duality, to a compromise with her own concepts. She accepts a marital offer from Gaku, a person she hardly knows and has no romantic feelings about, because
she has come to the realization that, first, it's easier to live life when there is someone sharing the same path who can help in a difficult moment, and, second, unlike social laws, biological laws are irreversible and the moment when her power as an object of desire will begin diminishing, and eventually may disappear altogether, is not far away. And at that point Gaku appears to be an ideal candidate to accompany her into the inevitable new stage of her life, for he seemingly accepts the unconventionality of her life style and Saki may think that marriage to him won't be a great unfaithfulness to her credo.

When the phone disconnected, Saki took out a small mirror from the table drawer and looked into the reflection of her face. It wasn't a young face any more. It was burnt by the sun, with quite noticeable black stains around her eyes. Who knows? Maybe this was the last chance she had to catch [a husband]. She closed her eyes, and again began feeling an irritation at the picture without even a slightly finished composition.71

This is very much in line with what Óba Minako said in her interview with Michiko Wilson in 1994:

MW: You certainly had an instinct, though—that this man would not block your future.
OM: I still think the marriage was a mistake. It's just not for me.
MW: But you’ve said time and time again that you can’t live without a man. Would you elaborate on this?
OM: Men and women are physically different, and in one’s life a man’s strength may be necessary, you know. Of course, a man can say the same thing about a woman. I think it is easier for a woman to have a man around than to live all by herself.
MW: And less monotonous.
OM: Exactly. In that sense, I find it easier to live with a man....72

Out of the three stories Óba Minako published in 1968, “Kôzu no nai e” turned out to be the most conceptual work where the writer’s avant-garde philosophy of the feminine is committed to paper in the most complete, most eloquent form. Not without literary merit, and, featuring the same brilliant style of narrative and dialogue between the characters which five years later brought “The Three Crabs" overwhelming success, “Kôzu no nai e” will ever stand out as an example of the unmatched social courage Óba Minako displayed in the very beginning of her literary career.
Notes

3 Ibid., 172.
4 Ibid., 172, 182.
Ichirô Yahashi, Gojûnin no sakka [Fifty writers], vol. 2 (Tokyo: Aoyumisha, 1982) 156.
5 Wilson, 8.
6 Yahashi, 156.
7 Ibid., 158.
9 Gunzô June 1968: 114.
10 Ibid., 115.
11 Ibid., 117.
12 Ibid., 118.
13 Ibid., 119.
14 Ibid., 121.
17 Ibid., 495.
18 Ibid., 497.
19 Ibid., 498.
20 Ibid., 497.
21 Ibid., 495.
23 Ibid., 33.
24 Ibid., 33.
25 Ibid., 14.
26 Ibid., 16.
27 Wilson, 110.
28 Ôba Minako zenshû, 23.
29 Ibid., 26.
30 Ibid., 32.
31 Ibid., 48.
32 Ibid., 12.
33 Ibid., 13.
34 Ibid., 15-16.
38 Ibid., 304.
39 Ibid., 305
40 Ibid., 305
41 Oba Minako zenshū, 157.
42 Ibid., 167.
43 Ibid., 227-228.
44 Wilson, 110.
45 Oba Minako zenshū, 186.
46 Ibid., 211-212.
47 Ibid., 184.
48 Ibid., 218.
49 Ibid., 158.
50 Ibid., 156.
51 Ibid., 186.
52 Ibid., 158, 228.
53 Ibid., 186, 220.
55 Ibid., 251.
56 Ibid., 251.
57 Ibid., 252.
58 Ibid., 248.
59 Oba Minako zenshū, 144.
60 Ibid., 69.
61 Ibid., 70.
62 Ibid., 78.
63 Ibid., 111.
64 Ibid., 141-142.
65 Ibid., 142.
66 Ibid., 143.
67 Ibid., 125.
68 Ibid., 103-104.
69 Ibid., 136-137.
70 Ibid., 143.
71 Ibid., 147.
72 Wilson, 172-173.
Chapter Three

Was there a precursor?

There were people who had been famous and were no longer, people who would be famous next week or next year, and people who would die unknown. There were people going up and people going down, people who had won their victories easily and people unjustly flung aside.

Irwin Shaw. *Evening in Byzantium.*

The 1960s turned out to be phenomenal years in Japan in many respects and this period of Japanese history has long been the focus of researchers and scholars. As a rule no serious work on contemporary Japan ignores what was happening in Japan at that time. In the process of gathering material for my thesis I ran into a very interesting evaluation of the 1960s in Japan given from a cultural perspective by Japanese literary historian, Yahashi Ichirō.

1960 was the year of the protests against the Security Treaty. It was not only the political consciousness that changed. The social structure was changing, the residential structure was changing, and the urbanization of the countryside was accelerating. Housing complexes were forming and the nuclear family was born. Then, 1964 was the year of the Tokyo Olympic Games. The number of vehicles was increasing dramatically; The Bullet Train was in operation; the tornado of *The Beatles* was raging. Japanese collectivism began to collapse giving way to migration and cosmopolitanism. In Ōba Minako’s own words, “In a good sense or a bad sense, Japan is getting frighteningly close to America, and it’s not only between America and Japan—all civilized countries are developing a unified psychology at an amazing pace.” (‘Dōkashitsuutsuaru kankaku’ [Feeling of an ongoing assimilation]). The postwar era came to an end and anti-Japanese feelings were returning. Among new generation of Japanese there were those who had little sense of identity as Japanese in the traditional way. A true postwar generation—spoilt and yelling nonsense—having no feeling of incompatibility to the West emerged. And this is the time when “The Three Crabs” appeared.2*

The 1960s also became some kind of “golden age” for Japanese literature on the whole, and Japanese women writers in particular. In these years the Japanese literary scene was entered by brilliant yet heretofore unknown authors such as Kurahashi Yumiko (1935–), Kôno Taeko

* Translation is mine.
(1926–), Setouchi Harumi (1922–) and others, often gaining recognition with their very first publications. In addition, the voices of the writers of the older generation including Enchi Fumiko (1905–1986), Hirabayashi Taiko (1905–1972) and Sata Ineko (1904–1998), finally sounded with full strength. There is no conclusive answer to the question of what exactly caused women’s literature to rise to new quantitative and qualitative levels and reach a par with the works of the male writers, though it is obvious that the dramatic economic, sociopolitical and even cultural changes Japan was undergoing in the 1960s played an important role in stimulating the prolific output of Japanese women writers.

As has been mentioned above, none of the review essays by the members of the Gunzô New Writers Award and Akutagawa Prize committees compares Ôba’s “The Three Crabs” to any other work created by Japanese women writers—neither those published earlier, nor those from the 1960s. On one hand, it looks quite logical that none of those distinguished literary experts discovered a work that in some way could serve a prototype for Ôba’s “The Three Crabs,” for one of the stringent criteria a winning work should meet is thematic and narrational originality. On the other hand, it is really hard to believe that no other female writer before Ôba Minako approached the complexity of the feminine from a similarly unorthodox angle with the same persuasion and talent.

It’s worth noting that Yahashi Ichirô denies Ôba’s “The Three Crabs” any originality or pioneering. In his view her work basically repeats “Hôyô kazoku” [Embracing family] by Kojima Nobuo that was published in 1965 in the July issue of the Gunzô magazine. “Whether or not it was Ôba Minako’s true intention, the main theme of ‘The Three Crabs’ is the destruction of family,” he points out. In my view it is not methodologically correct to compare a piece of Japanese female fiction, which was subject to certain limitations and even taboos, to the work of a male writer; therefore I am not going to dispute here the issue of priority. However, I don’t agree at all with Yahashi’s assessment of Ôba’s story—it is definitely not about the destruction of the family. Nonetheless, I must admit that the protagonist’s exploration of her feminine self and her escapism from the puritanical mores she is expected to follow as a “good wife, wise mother” do destroy the family Yahashi Ichirô seems to believe to be an ideal manifestation of the marital-familial relations.

To give an explicit answer to the question, whether Ôba Minako’s philosophy of the feminine was an extraordinary phenomenon having no analogues in the Japanese women’s literature of the 1960s, or it was a part of, even though avant-garde, but still the mainstream literary process, a detailed analysis at least of the majority of the works created in 1960-1967 is required. Obviously, this task goes beyond the scope of a Master’s thesis, so I have chosen several works that could be representative enough to make assumptions about what views on the feminine, marriage and family were dominant among Japanese women writers and Japanese society on the whole at that time. As I noted earlier, after studying the major works of Japanese women’s literature of the 1960s, I decided that my argumentation can be best illustrated by “Parutai” [Partei] (1960) by Kurahashi Yumiko, “Evening Bells” (1960) by Harada Yasuko, “Kiji” [Pheasant] (1963) by Setouchi Harumi, and “Saigo no toki” [The Last Time] (1966) by
Kôno Taeko.

Kurahashi’s “Parutai” is destined to be the work of choice in any critical writing on Japanese women’s literature of the 1960s. It became sort of a well-distinguished watershed dividing Japanese female literature into the pre- and post-1960s. In addition to its indisputable literary merits, it appeared as a bright and talented manifesto declaring that, speaking in general terms, the world created according to men’s blueprints is alien, even hostile to women and they need to find a way either to change it or to create one of their own.

Kurahashi’s heroine is in the process of applying for [Communist] Party membership, and encouraged by “Anata,” a party functioner and her mentor-boyfriend, she participates in various Party activities. She undergoes life changing and eye-opening experiences, such as sexual assault by one of the workers she was educating, pregnancy as the result of this rape, arrest by the police and a night in jail where the insignificance and patheticalness of “Anata” becomes apparent. After everything that has happened to Kurahashi’s protagonist, her determination to leave the Party is very understandable.

On my desk I found an envelope without a sender’s address. Inside it was a notification to the effect that I had been accepted into the Party, and a red membership card. After inspecting it carefully, I threw it away.

However, the destination she is heading to, or even the direction she is going in remain uncertain. Written in an existentialistic manner and narrowing its exploration of the feminine and the dichotomy between men and women to the environment of Communist ideology, Kurahashi’s story is far from addressing the whole range of the problems that most concerned Japanese women in the late 1950s and early 1960s, not to mention giving clear and certain answers to those problems.

“Evening Bells” by Harada Yasuko is another work that stands out from the mainstream of Japanese women’s fiction. In this regard it is necessary to note that it was Harada Yasuko, whose debut in a major literary magazine, the novel Banka [Elegy], published in 1956, won the Women’s Literature Prize and became a sound slap in the face to the official morality. “It immediately became a bestseller, with a sale of some seven hundred thousand copies in 1957 alone. Later the novel was made into a movie, which also was so popular that Hokkaido [the locality of the novel’s narration] began to attract many more tourists than before,” writes Makoto Ueda in the selection of Japanese modern fiction The Mother of Dreams and Other Short Stories.9

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Harada depicted a twenty-three year-old woman, a whimsical seducer, who wraps a well-established middle-aged man around her little finger. It was unheard of. That is to say that no female writer had ever dared to create such a *darashi no nai* [loose, easy] heroine.

Reiko [the story’s protagonist] broke taboos on all fronts. The sensational debut of the unknown writer seemed to have succeeded in making a clean break with the stereotypical image of the self-sacrificing and self-effacing Japanese woman. But within less than a year there was a backlash. The majority of male critics had caught on to Harada’s rebellious intent and unleashed their harshest criticism. In their eyes Reiko became simply a prankster and a spoiled girl, incapable of loving a decent man. Worse yet, she had no principles or morality, and she was an egotist to the core.¹⁰

Ôba Minako was twenty-six at that time and she lived and worked in Tokyo till 1959 before moving to the United States. For that reason it can be speculated that, as a literary person and a beginning writer herself, she at least should have heard about Harada’s work, which revealed so much proximity to Ôba’s own philosophy, and might be aware of the heat of the polemic and controversy it caused in the Japanese cultural scene in the late 1950s. Despite the fact that I found no mention of *Banka* in Ôba’s writings (there is a reference to Harada’s novel in *Gender Is Fair Game*, Michiko Wilson’s monograph on Ôba Minako,¹¹ but it’s not quite clear to whom it belongs—to Ôba or Wilson), it’s quite possible, that this story itself as well as the situation around it did leave a trace in Ôba’s works in one way or another.

“Evening Bells” was published four years after *Banka* and is an ordinary family story, where the narrator and the protagonist are the same person, a twenty-two-year-old woman, telling about her father and mother, her growing into understanding that her mother could have had a very intimate relations with a young piano teacher and her father might have been very close to a young female who was one of the most regular visitors at their home. In the protagonist’s narration, her mother and her life look to be an epitome of all the “virtues” the official ideology of “good wife, wise mother” has been successfully cultivating in Japanese females for decades.

Mother was by nature a quiet person, always the listener rather than the talker. When she spoke with her guests, a smile would play about her eyes and lips. When she laughed her quiet laugh the corners of her soft, lovely mouth always tilted upwards. Her hair and eyes were also beautiful, but I especially liked her hands… Her lady guests, with their high-society affectations, invariably stared at Mother with a mixture of admiration and animosity in their eyes.¹²

There is almost nothing in this work that would remind of the vehement debates over the author’s debut. However, at the very end of the story Harada does rise to an open declaration of her philosophy, putting into the mouth of her young heroine an emotional manifesto.
But I would have to love someone, love someone with all my might, in joy, in conflict, fear and sorrow—even should I myself be struck, I would have to love. Set free from the languid days I have passed, I would have to confirm and lay hold of my own existence [emphasis added]. That’s what I would use my tomorrow for.13

No matter how short this statement is, it brings a very strong message across. And even though it does not go further as to accuse the Japanese moralistic code per se, part of which is “good wife, wise mother” orthodoxy, rigidly governing and very often destroying lives of Japanese men and especially women, it sounds a bold challenge to the suffocating social dogmas and hypocritical ethics.

The story “Kiji” [Pheasant] by Setouchi Harumi (1922–) was published in 1963, at the same time Ōba Minako was in the process of writing her phenomenally avant-garde “Kōzu no nai e”, and like the majority of other works written by women writers, “Pheasant” is the life story of a woman. What makes this work stand out, especially as far as the subject of my discussion is concerned, is the fact that, written in the realistic manner, it explicitly lays out the author’s views on the feminine, especially its two core roles—“wife” and “mother”—one or both of which the greater part of women find themselves carrying out at some point in their lives. And, as such, this narrative allows to better understand what views on the role of women and their place in family and maternity were dominant in Japanese society in the 1960s. This story persuasively illustrates what feminine qualities were considered the supreme virtues and were actively propagated by the state and media, and what was deemed inappropriate and intolerable in women in Japan at that time and was condemned and oppressed as unworthy and amoral.

A woman named Makiko is the subject of the narration in “Pheasant.” Her life with her husband Kusumoto did not work and after several years of living together, when their daughter Rie was a little more than four years old, Makiko decides to leave her husband, but she has to leave Rie as well, for the law is on her husband’s side and gives the custody over her daughter her husband and his relatives. After divorce Makiko’s life does not go easy—she meets and lives with other men, but they do not stay in her life for long. In the end, she meets a married man Kuji who happens to have a daughter of the same age and by the same name as Makiko’s. Besides all the other circumstances, this fact tightly connects the protagonist to Kuji, with whom she will live together more than eight years. Society, however, including Kuji’s teenage daughter, condemns Makiko’s unconventional life style, and in the end of the story she realizes that she is doomed to be alone, for she will have no choice but to let Kuji return to his family by the time his daughter would become a college student.

Speaking of Makiko’s personality, at first sight it may look as if she epitomizes all the virtues of the feminine, the way Japanese ideology of “good wife, wise mother” postulates it, such as submissiveness, devotion to a husband, devotion to children and self-sacrifice. Setouchi’s heroine is indeed modest, devoted, submissive. She has been submissive enough as to put up with an unhappy and presumably violent marriage for a long time before making a decision to leave when her husband’s cruelty has become especially unbearable; she has been devoted to her child
as much as her maternal instincts urged her to; she is self-sacrificially devoted to the men she encounters in her life.

She [Makiko] had already begun to dote single-mindedly on Kuji to the extent that life without him seemed unimaginable. Her actions, then, stemmed from nothing more than her efforts to anticipate Kuji’s inner thoughts and fulfill his desires, however slight....

“Even if you go blind, that’s all right. I’ll just dash off any old piece of writing and earn some money. I’ll take care of you and your family. You could dictate your writings, couldn’t you? Even if it doesn’t sell, write a good novel...” Makiko really did believe in what she was saying.

Kuji was not the first man whom Makiko had loved in this self-sacrificing way. When she got engaged to her now ex-husband Kusumoto, after having met him through a match-maker, she decided she would try and strengthen her weak constitution before entering his home as a bride. She surprised everyone by launching abruptly and decisively into a month-long fast.14*

Here is how the author describes Makiko’s feelings and emotions toward her daughter when, while in Beijing, she hears the news that the war is over.

The next instant, she was seized with the animal-like fear that violence might break out and she would be separated from Riye. She flew through the gate of her home and dashed over to Riye, who was in the garden. As usual, the maid was holding the baby in her arms. As she reached out and took Riye from the maid, Makiko sank weakly to the ground.15

Therefore, on the whole Makiko appears an ordinary Japanese woman raised in accordance with the principles of the “good wife, wise mother” philosophy, and in addition to that she is gifted with a phenomenal maternal constitution that distinguishes her from other women—everything in her body is built in the best possible way to get pregnant, to bring forth, to give birth and to nurture babies—and in the narrator’s presentation it sounds like the supreme virtue that could be only given to a woman.16 However, this blessing comes into a conflict with Makiko’s inexhaustible need for love, love with no limits, love that “sought to fulfill, rather then be fulfilled,”17 and Makiko’s submissiveness, devotion and self-sacrifice receive quite a different overtone when illuminated by the narrator. “Makiko, who had quite indulged herself with men,

found fulfillment in any situation by ceaseless, and free, love. It had much in common with the self-sacrificing love, born of ignorance, that is shown by prostitutes.”

After breaking up with her husband, the protagonist fails to re-marry and thus create a new, “legitimate,” family, and for that reason she does not let out the unique creative maternal force she has within her—in the narrator’s opinion “wise mother” cannot exist without a “right,” formal marriage. “Even after she had separated from her husband [emphasis added], she got pregnant easily; and sooner than tell the man, Makiko just disposed of the matter herself. There was no hesitation on her part.”

Moreover, the narrator demonstrates that because of this unsatiable need to love, Makiko fails to give her daughter the necessary care and education she was obliged to according to the social concepts based on the postulates of “good wife, wise mother” ideology. Condemnation in the narrator’s voice is unambiguous... The narrator denies a married woman the right for love outside marriage and a mother her right for love at all, for it distracts her from concentrating all her attention on taking care of her child.

She [Makiko] remembered that she had never made any serious effort to teach Riye words, let alone songs.

From Beijing to their home town, from their home town to Tokyo, Riye had been dragged from place to place just at the time when she would have been learning to talk. And since they always moved to a new area before she had time to learn the speech of the old one, she was a lot later than most children in learning. On top of that, just at that time Makiko fell in love, her spirits soaring every day, and she had neither the time nor the patience to devote to talking with little Riye, who couldn’t say much of anything. [emphasis added] Riye was just beginning to take notice of the things around her, and there she was, for reasons she didn’t understand, being bounced about for hours on her mother’s back, her mother weeping all the while, or being suddenly and hysterically embraced, or going for half a day or more without even a word being said to her. Makiko had no memory of ever opening a picture book and showing it to Riye, no memory of ever teaching her a song. Rather, her only memories were of taking Riye along with her when she went to meet Tashiro, of Riye being squeezed between the two of them like a sandwich, of covering Riye’s eyes and stealing kisses.

The narrator does not tell much about Makiko’s life with her husband, not to mention going into details of their relations. But even the brief depiction of Makiko’s marriage that can be found in the story is enough to suggest the unmistakable conclusion that the protagonist has been subjected to abuse and violence on the part of her husband.

On that morning, Kusumoto exploded in anger over some matter so trifling it hardly seemed to warrant the outburst. When she came to, Makiko found that
she'd been hit in the right eye by the full force of Kusumoto's fist. Fresh blood was spurting from her eye, and she had been knocked down. ...

When Makiko saw in a mirror how her face had swelled up in a lump, she finally made up her mind. 21

It is not clear what caused this incident—by that time Makiko had already been in love with a young man by name Tashiro and her husband might have sensed that his wife had become unfaithful to him or, maybe, he had heard rumors about her affair. Whatever the reason, it seems that the narrator does not justify the cruelty of Makiko’s husband’s violent outburst. That’s why, as the narrator sees it, the protagonist did not have much of a choice but to leave her husband.

After recovering for two nights at a friend’s house two train stations away, Makiko returned to Ogu [the place she lived with her husband] early in the morning. Kusumoto was still at home. Riye’s smiling face popped into view in Makiko’s one unbandaged eye.

Standing at the entrance, without any intention of going in, Makiko invited Kusumoto and Riye out to the front. That day, too, was cloudy; the sky was low. “It’s no good. Please let me go.” It was the voice of one who’d been up all the previous night, thinking. Makiko’s tone was dry. “Well, haven’t you just come back?” “No, it won’t work. I’m no good,” Makiko replied. “I won’t let you have Riye.” Makiko didn’t respond. “If you’re going to go, then go. Leave just the way you are.” “Mama!” Riye was about to run after her. “Your mother is going to the hospital. You come back over here,” Kusumoto said in a suddenly furious voice as he picked Riye up and held her. “Take off that overcoat and get the hell out of here!”

Makiko took off the overcoat without looking at Kusumoto. She also threw off the muffler. As she put them down on a rock at the side of the road, she bowed, and silently walked away. “Mama, see you again soon,” Riye called out in a high voice. 22

Although the narrator does not elaborate much on the protagonist’s marriage, these two scenes give ample food for speculation that it was the abusive character of Kusumoto and not that much the protagonist’s “whorish personality,” as the narrator puts it, 23 that pushed Makiko to seek emotional fulfillment outside her marriage. However, even though the narrator does not deny Makiko her right to walk away from an abusive marriage, she is quite categorical in her verdict full of strong disapproval, interpreting Makiko’s decision to get separated from her husband as
an escape and some kind of a betrayal of the little Riye. “And for the love of young Tashiro she abandoned her husband, Kusumoto, and their only child, Riye.” But in the narrator’s view Makiko cannot buy her happiness at the expense of deserting her own child, and her new love is destined to fail.

Although Makiko made such a great sacrifice to join Tashiro, her affair with him came to a quick and pathetic end. Here was a young man, twenty-two years old, who had never known a woman’s body. On his concept of ideal love, any adventure, any immorality could be painted. However, he had no way of understanding this lone, twenty-six-year-old married woman who had abandoned her husband and child, left her home, and had come to him with a desperate look on her face and nothing but the clothes on her back.

Hair in disarray, cheeks ravaged from crying, her dirty eye-patch slipping off— in this brooding, womanly face (she’d even neglected her lipstick) there was nothing of the refinement, the elegance, of the tranquil wife she’d been, her arms wrapped around her young daughter [emphasis added].

She had broken off the reckless love affair.... After that she had been living the life of a poor woman alone, in Kyoto, where she had been staying ever since she ran off.

Not much happier turn out her other endless relationships with men in the course of her life, making her desire for love an unattainable and cursed longing.

But whichever the man, the abundance of Makiko’s love was overpowering, and he would mistake it for motherly love. However, as proof that her emotion was not maternal, Makiko would only release this boundless love to the one who was the object of her desire. Towards blood relations or other women she was, at best, perfunctory. Makiko’s love sought to fulfill rather than be fulfilled. Most men were unable to take on her vast love; it flooded over them and they ended up being swept off their feet by its waves. In the end, men who were loved by Makiko all became unhappy.

It can be said, that the narrator’s attitude toward the fact that Makiko left her husband is dualistic—on one hand, she admits that the protagonist’s marriage wasn’t something that could be put up with easily, yet, on the other, she puts the blame for the separation on Makiko, stressing throughout the story, that she shouldn’t abandon her husband and she was supposed to carry out her role of a wife and a mother no matter what. In the narrator’s judgment it was Makiko’s duty to do everything possible, both within and beyond the legal system, to reunite with her daughter and fulfill her motherly responsibility to her child, which could be expected from a devoted, self-sacrificing mother. The narrator is quite categorical, blaming Makiko for giving up too quickly and too easily.
People ... invariably wondered how Makiko and Riye could both live in Tokyo and not see each other. Makiko’s reply was formulaic:

“Seeing Riye wouldn’t bring her back to me. And they are doing such a good job raising her. I should refrain from making any trouble, don’t you think?”

In the last ten years Makiko had never once tried to see Riye, neither had she felt any strong desire to do so. She had long ago decided that Kusumoto would not let her have the child, but in point of fact, she could not remember ever having discussed with him where Riye would live. In any case, she had never risked her neck trying to get Riye [emphasis added]. Taking advantage of Kusumoto’s insistence that he would never let her have her daughter back, Makiko put herself in the position of having run away on her own. From then on she never once attempted, or even thought, to take Riye by force.

For her part, if Makiko had had even the slightest will to see the growing Riye, she could have made opportunities to do so in secret. But for some reason Makiko did not feel any desire to see her grown child. She did not have the courage to get to the bottom of her resistance toward seeing Riye. She was, for whatever reason, running away from it.28

Therefore, in the narrator’s view, Makiko has flouted the societal norms and morals and, what is even more important, she has failed to accomplish one of the two paramount feminine roles, “wise mother,” and for that reason she cannot remain a valuable member of the society and deserves exile. Even the younger generation who supposedly should gravitate to more progressive, more liberal values, find the protagonist’s life and the protagonist herself immensely embarrassing, something that had better be avoided.

It became clear that Rie [Kuji’s daughter], who had grown up knowing nothing about the nature of her father’s tie with Makiko, had at some point learned that the relationship was not a conventional one, not one of which her own mother had been a willing part. She no longer sent letters, and eventually even stopped sending New Year’s cards.29

Under the pressure of total isolation and disdain from society Makiko begins to realize that she has ended up in a social vacuum, doomed to live in exile for the rest of her life. And along with her Kuji, the man she loves more than anything else and is ready to sacrifice her life for, is doomed to exile too. That’s why Makiko clearly sees that the day when she will have to give Kuji back to his daughter is inescapable.30

However, even more unbearable than reproach by society becomes the torture of the emotional pain Makiko feels in her heart, the torture of being torn apart by the judgment of her inner arbiter, her conscience.
In the number of years since the separation, Makiko had had so few dreams of Riye that she could enumerate all of them. At the time of the separation, Makiko had thought each night that she would like to see Riye in a dream, but she never did, and gradually stopped even thinking about her. Now, without any warning, Riye came to her three or four times in dreams.

In the dreams, Makiko’s heart would begin to throb with longing. And yet after she woke up, more than by feelings of longing or joy, she was attacked by an oppressive and ominous foreboding that left her depressed for half a day.31

... Makiko turned forty. At last it seemed to dawn on her that her ill-starred fate turned fitfully on the axis of a paradox: her overly whorish personality had been forced to live in a body blessed beyond the ordinary with maternal capabilities.32

In the closing scene of the story, where Makiko due to her professional duties visits women’s clinic and attends the procedure of abortion, the narrator’s didacticism reaches the highest point. Everything in the narration—the details, the description, Makiko’s thoughts and feelings—leaves no doubts that narrator not only pleads Makiko guilty for her crime and pronounces the sentence, but also executes it. And the very last thing Makiko sees before collapsing is her daughter Riye in the appearance of an angel: suddenly it dawns on Makiko that Riye was the most important thing in her life and if she had devoted herself fully, with no reservations to her daughter, in return the protagonist’s life would have been given a purpose and she would have achieved the fulfillment and happiness she has been seeking so hard but has been doomed to never experience, for she has failed to understand that the only way she could attain her dreams was to become a “good wife” and a “wise mother.”

The inside of Makiko’s mouth grew dry. The back of her head turned cold. For some time now, the patient, unconscious, had been moaning like a wild animal. To Makiko, it was Makiko herself screaming. Had she lived until now only so that she could receive this punishment. ...In place of the unconscious patient, Makiko was herself taking on all the pain that the patient was suffering, all the humiliating torture.

In Makiko’s vision, innumerable eyeless, noseless fetal phantoms line up in jostling heaps like the gray tombstones at Adashino, making her want to scream out in terror. Just as people at their hour of death use their last bit of strength calling out for light, so Makiko called out for Riye. All of a sudden, Makiko could hear again, with heart-rending vividness, Riye’s hearty first cry as it had echoed down through the morning gloom at the maternity hospital on that little lane in Beijing.

“There are the eyes,” the doctor whispered.

The tips of the forceps held two tiny black things that looked like little sweet beans. And as her knees buckled and she collapsed, Makiko saw baby Riye,
wings spreading out from her shoulders, soaring gently upwards and beckoning.33

Kôno Taeko’s “Saigo no toki” [The last time]34 was published in 1966. The fifth collection of Kôno’s stories, which included “Saigo no toki” as the title story, brought the author the Women’s Literature Prize for 1966.35 By the time of publication of “Saigo no toki,” Kôno Taeko had been already acknowledged as a leading Japanese women writer—her story “Kani” [Crabs]36 in 1963 won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize—who, as Yonaha Keiko points out, by exploring “the world of abnormal psychology, violence, and evil in the attempt to fathom the loneliness of modern existence, to explore metaphysically the ultimate meaning of human life,”37 opened new thematic areas into which Japanese female writers had not delved before her.38 Yet, “The Last Time” is written mainly in a realistic manner which makes it easier to follow Kôno’s ideas. This story is also of great interest for my discussion for two more reasons. First of all, the timing factor: “The Last Time” was published not long before Ôba Minako wrote “The Three Crabs.” And then, despite the fact that “The Last Time” does dare question some aspects of the Japanese marital-familial system as of the mid-1960s, the story’s protagonist appears to be an epitome of an ideal wife the way the “good wife, wise mother” concept postulates it.

The story begins with some kind of a mystic event in the life of the protagonist, a married woman by the name of Noriko. A supreme being, some omnipotent and mystical Somebody, tells her that she has only twenty-four hours to live. Noriko accepts this reality, but begs to be given more time to settle “various things”39 and in the end manages to buy two more hours, making the balance of her remaining life twenty-six hours. Despite this mysterious beginning, the rest of the story is written in an exclusively realistic manner. Because Noriko has been convinced that she indeed has only twenty-six hours to live, her life gains dynamism, and it makes her reflect on the years she has been living with her husband Asari from a new, different perspective. She also thinks a lot about the future wondering how her husband’s life will go after she has died.

As mentioned earlier, Noriko, in my opinion, epitomizes the characteristics that the “good wife, wise mother” ideology proclaimed the absolute virtues of a Japanese woman. Everything the protagonist does and thinks about at the very last moments of her life can serve as the perfect illustration of what an ideal wife was expected to be in the view of the officialdom and general public. Despite the fact that Noriko thinks that she has just twenty-six hours to prepare herself for eternity, she is mostly concerned about unimportant things, which, from the broad, metaphysical perspective of what the human’s life is all about, look like insignificant trifles: she thinks that she needs to leave a message to the milkman to bring only one bottle of milk starting the next day; she is trying to find the best place for her set of keys; she is concerned to hide the laundry and other stuff she wants to get rid of in such a place where her husband wouldn’t notice; she feels like going to a public bath, but gives up this idea, for she thinks that she has too

many other urgent things to do.

She went upstairs and took from the closet a wicker chest that was underneath some large cushions. She took out three cotton kimonos, all Asari’s [emphasis added], and put the chest back. As she stood up she looked at the kimonos in her arms. In a month or so, it would be time for cotton kimonos. He will notice these if I put them in his chest downstairs with his underwear, she thought. Suddenly Noriko thought it would be nice if she could talk to her husband when he was wearing one of these kimonos for the first time on an early summer evening. She wanted to whisper to him from somewhere inside this cotton kimono.40

So, Noriko gets down to composing her death notes to her husband, and every line of her writing overflows with such a devotion, self-sacrifice and humility, that she comes to the degree of denying any value and significance to her own life at all.

The idea of her talking to Asari like this after her death made her think that she should greet him again in winter when he put on his overcoat. She wrote another note: “It’s gotten rather cold. I bet you stop for a drink on your way home tonight. Here’s some money for that [emphasis added]. I wish I could say that this is from my own saving. As you’ve told me, and as you seem to believe, I’m not good at saving money. You’re right. This is the money I had left—the last of my monthly allowance, together with the money I was going to take with me to the funeral. Since you’re kind of fussy about money spent for anything other than to buy yourself drinks, you must have been wondering about this money. Weren’t you ransacking the drawer, looking for it the other day? You finally found it. I’m sorry there’s no interest payment on it [emphasis added]. Well then, say hello to the friends you’ll meet tonight.”41

In her other note for the time when Asari would go on a business trip, Noriko writes, “...think of me a little when you leave the house. That’ll make you remember to lock the door and to check for fire hazard before you leave [emphasis added]. Have a good trip.”42

And Noriko’s last note which she expects her husband will read on Christmas, says, “I hope you’ll remarry and be happy. I won’t greet you anymore. Goodbye,” after which Noriko thinks that she would then disappear from Asari’s life.43

The same sentiments of devotion and self-sacrifice fill Noriko’s note to Asari’s future wife. “Seems like you’ve settled in quite well. You’re so good to him, and that makes him happy. I hope you’ll make him happier...”44

One can suppose that, maybe, these are just the deeds and thoughts of a woman who knows that she is going to die soon and by doing nice things in the last hours of her life and making her final words sound nice, she simply wants to leave good memories about herself.
Maybe, in reality, Noriko is a different person: selfish enough, knowing what she wants in life for herself, and pursuing her own agenda. These doubts vanish when we read what the narrator writes about the protagonist as a wife.

Noriko had always treated Asari rather well. Not even once did he have to go get a towel when he washed; she gave him clean underwear every day; she always served all kinds of dishes; and his sheets were always clean. She was tolerant about his drinking. She didn’t get angry even when he came home after midnight and wanted to drink more, or when he became rowdy and threw up, keeping her from sleeping. She didn’t look particularly unhappy the following morning. When Asari, who had never known a hangover, emerged the next morning looking even more refreshed than usual, Noriko found that without even trying, she felt refreshed herself. When he wanted to go out for a drink with his friends, she let him have all the money she could spare instead of trying to discourage him.

Yet most wives didn’t seem to possess such tolerance and such a willingness to serve. On such mornings, wouldn’t most couples refuse to speak, one of them with a hangover and the other pouting?

No, Noriko is not insincere when she practically nullifies her own life in order to make her husband happy for the last time: her unparalleled devotion to him is genuine and comes from her heart. In this regard the personality of the object of her dedication and loyalty is of great interest, for, if Noriko’s husband is an extraordinary person, caring for Noriko in the same manner as she cares for him, the protagonist’s love and faithfulness can be understood and justified. However, the way Noriko’s husband is portrayed in the story gives him nothing that may present him as a person who deserves the protagonist’s commitment, making even more striking the contrast between the personalities of the two main characters.

Once every ten days or so, Asari would come home and say, while changing his clothes, “I don’t want it tonight,” meaning he didn’t want sake with his dinner. If she would say, “That’s good,” or “You’re being good,” he would snap back irritably, “I didn’t say I wouldn’t drink at all until I went to bed.” If she merely said “Yes” or “All right,” he would say reproachfully, “You’re so indifferent.”

On evenings when he went without liquor, he tended to be in a bad mood... He didn’t know what to do with himself on such evenings and ended up going to the neighborhood movie house. *Asari rarely invited her along* [emphasis added] on these occasions, and she didn’t particularly want to go. Whenever he said he was going out after having a quick supper without any liquor, she felt relieved, and cheerfully helped him get ready.

And even here Noriko demonstrates understanding, tolerance and generosity.
Another unattractive characteristic of Asari’s personality is his stinginess, in general, and especially about the money Noriko spends on herself. In one of her notes to Asari, the protagonist explicitly writes, that he is “kind of fussy” about money spent for anything other than buying himself drinks, and when writing to Asari’s future wife she is quite straightforward saying about Asari that “for some reason he’s particularly reluctant to pay for our clothes.”

Thinking about her husband’s life after she’s gone, Noriko is positive that after her death he will marry again, and not because he is a devoted family man who simply cannot live without a family, but because other than in marriage there is no way he can live a convenient and comfortable life where everything is being taken care of by a devoted and immediately available wife. It’s most likely that this is the very way Asari, as a typical Japanese male, regards the issue of marriage, considering the responsibilities it brings as just a small price he has to pay for the convenience. Such a utilitarian attitude to marriage leaves no room for the emotional, romantic aspect in the relations between husband and wife, taking love, respect, understanding and appreciation out of the equation and turning their relationship into merely room service contract. Judging from his past and his personality, Asari wouldn’t desperately seek another marriage, but at the same time he wouldn’t give up the idea altogether. It wasn’t that he would feel he had to get married; he would go ahead and do so without thinking too much about it.

What is most astounding, however, is that after Noriko has thought all about her own life and about Asari, she thinks that she has enjoyed it and believes that they loved each other—she writes about this in her letter to Asari’s future wife. “Noriko thought that her heart and Asari’s still had their vigor. Day to day, she was able to sense the beating of his heart, and he, she was sure, was able to sense the beating of hers.”

It’s hard to believe that the relations between Noriko and Asari, the way they appear in the protagonist’s memories and reflections and the narrator’s account, were built on love. And for that reason, Noriko’s belief that they loved each other might stem from her distorted understanding of what love is all about which could be vastly influenced by the “good wife, wise mother” ideology. Or she simply does not want to face the reality and tries to deceive herself with beautiful fairy tales to justify in her own eyes and those of others the devotion and self-sacrifice with no boundaries she has given to her husband. Actually, it does not really matter from what source Noriko’s illusion she calls “love” derives, for in her letter to Asari’s future wife she practically renounces her own assertion by trying to persuade the latter not to take too hard the fact that Asari and Noriko were married, because now it seems to Noriko that her life with Asari was not that of a family the way Noriko comprehends the essence of the family life. Here is how she puts her thoughts on paper.

Thinking about it now, maybe Asari and I were not truly a husband and wife; we were nothing more that a particular man and woman who were together. I shared a life with Asari longer than other women had—for six years we lived together and were legally married... Still, our life was that of a man and woman living together. At least I believed that we loved each other. People wonder if couples who don’t
share a sexual life are a real husband and wife, but we weren't a real couple in the opposite sense. I hope that you'll be a real couple. Please let him have a real married life. He doesn't seem to have ever experienced that.\(^{53}\)

Taking half of the responsibility for the fact that "she and Asari were simply a man and a woman and incapable of living as a married couple—or becoming one,"\(^{54}\) Noriko goes further, trying to understand what lies in the nature of a true marriage.

A legal bond, a shared household, sexual love, and emotional love were supposed to be the four pillars of marriage. But just as no one would say that four pillars alone were enough to make a house, those four conditions were not enough to construct a true marriage. Noriko felt that she and Asari had not put up a roof or painted the walls. They hadn't built anything together. Even if one pillar became shaky, as long as the walls and roof were intact, a house was still a house. She felt that they hadn't been building anything from their days together, but instead had been living one day at a time.\(^{55}\)

Earlier Noriko comes to the unexpected discovery that true marriage, to be of full value, to be "exciting and tempting,"\(^{56}\) should also involve extramarital affairs of a husband and a private life of a wife including her saving the husband’s money in secret.\(^{57}\) In her search for the rationale why her relationship with Asari has failed to live up to this new understanding of what a true marriage is supposed to be, she identifies several reasons—"they had not married at a young age, it wasn’t their first marriage, and they had no children—all of these things contributed to the fact that their life was simply that of a man and woman, but none of these was the basic reason."\(^{58}\) She comes to quite a sudden supposition that "the cause might be the propensity the two of them had for one to suggest the use of objects owned by former lovers, and for the other to gladly accept, but she wasn’t sure."\(^{59}\) Finally, she concludes that their life was too tranquil, they did not know true pleasure or difficulties,\(^{60}\) they accepted "each other’s words, whatever they were, only in a positive sense."\(^{61}\) When watching a movie with Asari at her last night before the day Noriko thinks she will die, she notices that she and Asari have a lot of similarity with the married couple portrayed in the film:

There was no fighting between this husband and wife. There were no incidents that might have caused them to divorce, and so their days continued. There were only the short, ironic conversations that affirmed their mutual feelings of isolation. ... The couple in the movie moved farther away from each other by always responding negatively, but she and Asari had been partners in a crime of distortion by always responding positively to each other.\(^{62}\)

At the end of the story, when Noriko sits down to write to Asari her final letter, she thinks that she has found a remedy that could make their relationship "into that of a real married couple." "If we continue our life as lovers, we ought to do so wholeheartedly, even if it means that we fight. In any case, when I finally die, I want to savor my last hours. Even if I had regrets, I would feel
that I had lived more fully.\textsuperscript{63}

Although this conclusion sounds quite logical after all the reasoning the heroine made while re-evaluating her life, to an unbiased reader it looks more than paradoxical. Most probably the main reason why Noriko failed to achieve, as she puts it, the feeling of fulfillment in her married life is her following to the norms of the “good wife, wise mother” ideology. The postulates of this ideology reduced the meaning of her life as a human to merely a role of some kind of an all-providing logistic unit whose task was to be entirely dedicated to furnishing her husband with all possible comforts and satisfaction. And, in some way, the protagonist did feel that she had been too a good wife\textsuperscript{64} (a “good wife,” to be exact). However, the solution she came up with, which, in her opinion, should fulfill her life and bring more purpose to it, remained within the framework of the same concept “good wife.” Following this concept has failed Noriko’s life so far and will not allow her to realize her full human potential, unless she understands that being “good wife, wise mother” is a trap, a no exit life path leading nowhere. And it should be noted here, that Noriko, thinking that a wife must have her secret life to be happier, is still very far from the genuine understanding of the reality that the true marriage has not to be built at the cost of a woman’s life. Yet, she is moving in the right direction to eventually discovering that in order to achieve fulfillment she does not need a “secret life”—what she needs is to pursue her \textit{own} life which by no means ceases its existence in marriage, but continues, though in a new, different capacity.

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As it can be seen through the prism of the selected writings, “women who began to write actively in the mid-1960s share some basic concerns: their women characters question the traditional role assigned to women and try to examine the morality they grew up accepting; they doubt the meaning of their lives and reflect upon their sense of self; and they are more aware of their secret yearnings and unfulfilled dreams than women in earlier fiction.”\textsuperscript{65} However, no matter how discontent with the status quo are the heroines of Japanese women’s literature of 1960-1967, as a rule, they do not see any way out of the dead end of the roles society imposes on them and very often in their search for the new horizons of their lives they get lost in the maze of the same old doctrine “good wife, wise mother,” that has brought them to the blind alley in the first place.

Therefore, as the analysis of the works I selected to represent Japanese female fiction of 1960-1967 shows, Japanese women writers on the whole clearly saw and understood that the Japanese contemporary marital-familial system was not only outdated but became a serious obstacle on the way of the development of the equal gender relations. This system where the ‘ryōsai kenbo’ concept, one of the recipes of the social engineering of the epoch which had sunk into oblivion, kept playing a major role, confined Japanese women into the narrow margins of the twin roles “good wife” and “wise mother.” Apparently lives of Japanese women were sacrificed for the sake of the nation’s welfare and economic success. The price the system forced them to pay was their happiness and the feeling of fulfillment and satisfaction of life.
All protagonists of the reviewed stories are not happy with the status quo and are in the search for a way to realize their dreams of and fulfill their lives. However, they either do not know in what direction they should go, as it is with the heroine of Kurahashi Yumiko’s “Parutai,” or the solutions they come up with, remain within the framework of the same ‘ryōsai kenbo’ orthodoxy, as it happens to Noriko of Kôno Taeko’s “The Last Time.” Makiko, the protagonist of “Pheasant” by Setouchi Harumi, is another example of a woman searching for love and happiness, but what she finds in reality is sorrow, loneliness and misery. However, the reason of her anguish, as it follows from the narrative, is not the marital-familial system, as it is for Noriko. On the contrary, her life turns into a disaster exactly because she ignores the social mores and breaks the norms of the “good wife, wise mother.” Only the heroine of Harada Yasuko’s “Evening Bells” intuitively feels that her road to the full self-realization lies aside from the dead end path of ‘ryōsai kenbo’ and clearly declares her choice of freedom.

So, it can be said, that when Ōba Minako published her “The Three Crabs,” “Niji to ukihashi” and “Kōzu no nai e” in 1968, there was almost no other female writer who could match Ōba’s radicalism and unorthodoxy of her views on the Japanese establishment and especially marital-familial system. At the same time, it would be correct to say that there were some authors who apparently laid a groundwork, on which Ōba Minako’s revolutionary philosophy emerged. Among them can be named Harada Yasuko, who clearly saw the suffocating effect of the ‘ryōsai kenbo’ dogma but either could not find a solution to this social problem or did not have enough courage to make a challenge to the establishment and demand to change the status quo, and Kôno Taeko whose exploration of the feminine sexuality and psyche opened for Japanese women writers new horizons inspiring them to probe into “unmapped territories.”
Notes

5 Gunzō July 1965:
6 Yahashi, 158.
7 Tanpen josei bungaku kindai [Contemporary short stories of women’s literature], ed. Taiko Imai (Tokyo: Ōfū, 1993).
Yahashi, 25-30.
Yonaha, 261.
9 The Mother of Dreams, 46.
10 Michiko Wilson, Gender Is Fair Game (Armonk, NY and London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999) 71.
11 Ibid., 70.
12 The Mother of Dreams, 52.
13 Ibid., 68.
15 Ibid., 146.
16 Ibid., 135.
17 Ibid., 137.
18 Ibid., 137.
19 Ibid., 135.
20 Ibid., 144.
21 Ibid., 140.
22 Ibid., 140.
23 Ibid., 137.
24 Ibid., 137.
25 Ibid., 141.
26 Ibid., 143.
27 Ibid., 137.
28 Ibid., 142.
29 Ibid., 146.
30 Ibid., 147.
31 Ibid., 138.
32 Ibid., 137-138.
33 Ibid., 148.
34 Taeko Kôno, “Saigo no toki [The last time],” Saigo no toki (Tokyo: Kadokawa shoten, 1975) 5-45.
35 This Kind of Woman, 44.
36 Taeko Kôno, “Kani” [Crabs].
37 Japanese Women Writers, xvi.
38 Yonaha, 7, 259.
39 Saigo no toki, 7.
40 Ibid., 15-16.
41 Ibid., 17.
42 Ibid., 18.
43 Ibid., 18.
44 Ibid., 23.
46 Ibid., 16.
47 Ibid., 17.
48 Ibid., 22-23.
49 Saigo no toki, 18-19.
50 Ibid., 26.
51 Ibid., 25.
52 Ibid., 39.
53 Ibid., 25.
54 Ibid., 26.
55 Ibid., 39-40.
56 Ibid., 28.
57 Ibid., 28.
58 Ibid., 26.
59 Ibid., 26.
60 Ibid., 40.
61 Ibid., 42.
62 Ibid., 41-42.
63 Ibid., 44.
64 Ibid., 27.
65 This Kind of Woman, xvii.
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