

## Chapter 1 Tottori: The Launch of a “New Woman”

### A Journey to *San'in*

In the summer of 1997, I visited Tottori “in search of Ozaki Midori.”

I took the Izumo-gō special express sleeper train. As a special express train, it must have been quite fast, but to my body, accustomed to the bullet train, the constant rattling felt like one of the local trains I took long ago.

In my student days, I frequently took sleeper trains for mountain-climbing excursions. That was in the 1950s, so it had been some 40 years since I had taken a sleeper train. Though it was no longer called the “Blue Train,” it was just as before: no vending machines, no vendors inside the carriage, narrow beds, and the same toilets. In its decrepitude—one wondered if it were the last sleeper train just before suspension of service—it made me feel I had slipped 40 years back in time. I had decided to take this sleeper train to Tottori, in an age when one can go anywhere in Japan via bullet train or airplane, in order to feel a little closer to Ozaki Midori and her trips to and from Tokyo. For a woman living in the countryside in the early Showa Era, going to Tokyo was a huge step toward realizing her dreams, and it also must have been a dangerous adventure and gamble.

But even more important for me, and an unavoidable factor in considering Ozaki Midori, was her semi-forced return home with her oldest brother. It is said that on that day, Midori leaned out of the window of her departing train and waved her hand furiously at Takahashi Takeo who had come to see her off at Tokyo Station. It is as though we can hear Midori wailing, “I don’t want to go home!” Although I tried to avoid sympathizing too strongly with Midori on that train, going home with her older brother, an officer in the Navy, I gave myself up to the sensations of travel that naturally rose within me.

The train passed through Kyoto silently at midnight and switched to the San'in line. Dozing off, I awoke in the early morning as we arrived on the Japan Sea side of the country and I will never forget my deep emotions at that moment. Ever since the advent of the bullet train, no matter what regional city you travel to, the station and its surrounding streets are so standardized you no longer experience that fresh sense of having traveled to a new place with a different landscape. But much like the opening lines of Kawabata Yasunari’s *Snow Country*, which describe a journey through a tunnel, across a border and into a strange land, the San'in scenery at dawn that I saw through the window of the train gave me the vivid impression of having

arrived in another world. The villages we passed were still dark. Only the deserted station was lit up, and I realized that I had not seen a town early in the morning empty of people for a long time. Kathmandu and Chiang Mai are dark in the early morning, and so was this town at the entrance to San'in. With a nostalgic feeling as though recalling once-familiar sensations, I breathed in the atmosphere of this still-sleeping town.

The houses in the villages and towns of San'in all have tile roofs. These roofs were glittering all around me in the gray mist of dawn, such that I wondered if the roof tiles of this area were glazed with some special enamel. At a distance, only the thatched or tiled roofs of the Japanese-style houses, with their wide roofs and deep eaves, could be seen. In the winter in snow country, people sleep under those roofs, as in the poem by Miyoshi Tatsuji:

Let Taro sleep, the snow piles up on Taro's roof

Let Jiro sleep, the snow piles up on Jiro's roof

Gazing at the roofs scattered amongst the rice paddies in the summer dawn, I thought to myself, "This is San'in, the land of Ozaki Midori!"

As though a blue curtain was gradually lifted, the distant gray scenery became visible and soon the near trees, houses, and roads were clearly outlined, flying past at the same speed as the train. The sense that my own skin and portions of my body were peeling off and flying backward deepened my feeling that this first trip into this land was a search for something unknown yet deeply related to myself. It was somehow different from the physical, tactile stimulation of encountering a foreign culture and unfamiliar world I had felt in the past when visiting the Middle East or Nepal; I thought it was perhaps akin to running full-tilt into the morning sun toward self-destruction and the shedding of my skin as in the poem "Ariel" by Sylvia Plath.

Disembarking at dawn after a ten-and-a-half hour nighttime journey with little sleep, I immediately took to this quiet Tottori, with its bright and orderly appearance, so unlike the other bullet train station towns. A broad street extended straight out from the station toward Shiroyama Park and the castle ruins. Although it was past eight o'clock in the morning, there were only a few commuters in the station, yet the streets of the city seemed calm and composed rather than desolate. It was very bright, perhaps due to its proximity to the ocean, and the morning light seemed to penetrate every nook and cranny of the streets, with their rows of low buildings. Tottori City, more than any other regional city I had ever visited, had the look of a regional

city. I felt I had found what I was looking for in Tottori's atmosphere of pride and independence, and once again I thought to myself that this was Ozaki Midori's city.

### **Forty Years of Silence**

Ozaki Midori was born in December, 1896 (Meiji 29), and died in July, 1971 (Showa 46) at the age 75. Hers was certainly not a short life, yet Midori has been marked by the term "short-lived."

Ozaki Midori's active period as a writer lasted 14 years, from 1919 (Taisho 8) when she arrived in Tokyo determined to become a writer at the age of 23, until September, 1932 (Showa 7), when she was basically forced by her eldest brother Atsuro to return to Tottori at the age of 36.

Almost nothing is known about her life in the nearly 40 years after she stopped writing. Recently, as Ozaki Midori's works have been reevaluated, interest in Midori's life after her return home has increased and several critical biographies have been written, but though a rough description of her life after she stopped writing can be derived from the stories of her relatives and a small number of friends and acquaintances, accounts of Midori's inner life remain almost entirely in the realm of imagination. To such an extent did Ozaki Midori live out the long days of her life in silence, neither speaking nor writing as a woman, let alone as an author.

A truly long and eventful period of Japanese history followed Midori's return to Tottori in 1932. It encompassed the repression of thought under the Peace Preservation Law, the forced conversion of political leftists, war with China, the war with the United States from Pearl Harbor to the firebombing raids on Japan, the battle of Okinawa, the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, surrender and vast devastation, the black market, occupation, a new Constitution, postwar reconstruction and high economic growth, labor and student movements, the New Left, the National University Struggles, and the women's movement. Such continuous waves of history were still going on when Midori died in 1971.

During those years, the postwar activities of other women writers that Midori had known, such as Hayashi Fumiko, Hirabayashi Taiko, and Uno Chiyo were remarkable. Hayashi Fumiko, a particularly close friend, became a very popular writer. One has the feeling that if Ozaki had had the desire to write and publish, Hayashi Fumiko would not only have helped but also enabled her participation in the scene.

In the 1960s, a new women's literature was born with the postwar generation including Kono Taeko, Kurahashi Yumiko, Shiraishi Kazuko, Yoshihara Sachiko, and

Tomioka Taeko. The 1970s then saw the rise of feminist literary criticism, one of the perspectives from which the current re-evaluation of Ozaki Midori is taking place.

Midori liked movies, and she is known for pioneering film criticism and incorporating avant-garde cinematic modes of expression in her literature. The postwar period was the golden age of Hollywood, and Midori's beloved film became the top form of entertainment in Japan too, reaching its peak in terms of numbers of viewers and films produced in the late 1950s and early 60s. Both literature and film would gradually yield their spots to television and comics, yet Midori spent this long period of extreme social movements in Japan, spanning the prewar, wartime, and postwar eras, indifferently, making absolutely no literary or social comments, and without setting foot outside the space of her individual daily life. In the 1920s to the early 1930s, Ozaki Midori had anticipated the future and single-handedly paved the way for modernist literature by exceeding the frame of genre with avant-garde modes of expression and a keen sensitivity that surpassed the modern literature of the time. Her long silence is therefore mortifying beyond words, but at the same time it somehow seems refreshingly brave.

It is because we persist in considering Ozaki Midori a writer that we find her silence mortifying. If we think of Midori as an individual who happened to be a writer as well, can we call the latter half of her life after she returned to Tottori a long time of silence and retirement simply because her inner life during this period is not accessible to us? Ordinary people live full lives even though they do not speak of or write about their inner thoughts. I think that Midori must have decided to live the latter half of her life as an individual. Ozaki Midori wrote unforgettable works that are enchanting even today (or rather are even more enchanting today) and left indelible footprints in modern Japanese literature as a woman writer of unique talent, but because her period of activity was not long and her works few in number, because she was never lauded by the literary elite, and moreover because she suddenly disappeared from the sight of her fellow writers and readers as though involved in an accident, her works were on the verge of being forgotten and erased from literary history.

There are certainly many writers who were active for only short periods of time. Among the famous examples is Rimbaud, who shocked readers with poems such as *A Season in Hell* but then completely distanced himself from the literary world after only a few years and vanished. Writers who died young due to poverty or illness include Radiguet and Poe, or in Japan, Higuchi Ichiyō, Kajii Motojirō, Nakahara Chūya, Nakajima Atsushi, and Hōjō Tamio, while the list of those who simply died prematurely is too long to mention. If we consider the fact that Natsume Sōseki's

writing career lasted only ten years, perhaps we cannot even call Ozaki Midori's fourteen years "short" without qualification.

However, Ozaki Midori differs from these writers in that there is an inseparable connection between her forced return to her hometown in Tottori, to the family from which she had once escaped, and the end of her writing. We could probably find several examples of men or women who went to Tokyo to become writers, but gave up and returned to their natal homes to marry or take over the family business, ending their writing careers.

In Ozaki Midori's case, she was branded a "drug addict" and taken back to her hometown by her brother only one year after her most important work, *Wanderings in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*, had been published. In other words, at the height of her creative ambitions, with her career gaining momentum, and just as her works were beginning to attract attention and praise. This was the end of Ozaki Midori as a writer.

After she was taken back to Tottori, Midori was briefly hospitalized for rest. But why is it that she stopped writing after settling in with her family? According to various sources, in the year following her return home she submitted a short article at the request of a local newspaper and that summer held a party celebrating the publication of *Wanderings in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*, attended by several local celebrities in various fields. In addition, it seems likely that Midori read the critical essay by Shirakawa Masami, "A Few Reflections on Reality: Prompted by the Literature of Ozaki Midori," which appeared in *Higoyomi (Daily Calendar)* in October, 1933 (later compiled in Sōjusha's *Collected Works of Ozaki Midori*), which lauded *Wanderings in the Realm of the Seventh Sense*. Considering this, it might have been the sudden death in November of that same year of her older brother, the one who took her back to Tottori, that caused her to stop writing. It seems quite possible that as a result of his death, the heavy burden of responsibility for the family fell on Midori's shoulders.

Was it that Midori consciously gave up "pure" creativity, or did the desire to create continue to burn within her, deeply buried under the surface of daily life? This question reveals the overlap of critiques of Ozaki Midori's literature that consider her works and modes of expression and the search for Ozaki Midori as a person who suddenly disappeared. The fact that this question is unanswerable makes criticism and biography seem impossible. Our interest in Midori as a woman overlaps inextricably with criticism of her work.

I had not come to Tottori in order to investigate the biographical facts of her life as clues to a literary critique of her work, but when I encountered the bright calm

of the nearly deserted streets that early morning, I felt that Tottori in the San'in region could teach me something. Something about the division of women into "writing" and "living."

### **An Intellectual, Middle-Class Family in a Regional City**

Ozaki Midori's father Chōtarō was adopted into the Ozaki family of Iwai from his natal family of Yamada of Tomo Village, Kedaka County, Tottori Prefecture, and is said to have been an excellent educator with a deep knowledge of Chinese literature. When Midori was born, Chōtarō was the head teacher of Iwai Elementary School, but he transferred to Omokage Elementary School in Tottori when Midori was four, and the whole family moved to Tottori City. Chōtarō served as the both the headmaster of Omokage Elementary School and Kurata Elementary School in the neighboring village, and it is said that he also participated in the educational administration of Tottori Prefecture.

Midori's mother Masa was the third daughter of Yamana Chōdō, head priest of Saihōji Temple of the Shinshu Honganji Sect in Iwai District, Iwai County. When I visited Iwai District (currently Iwai Hotspring, Iwami City) on that summer trip in 1998, it seemed like an unremarkable, quiet rural town. Saihōji Temple, with its small hanging bell tower, is a quiet corner of land with thick summer grass and a narrow stream running through a copse of tall trees a short distance away from the center of town.

It seemed to me that Midori might have perceived the move from Iwami to Tottori as a first step into "the modern age." Tottori City, along with Yonago City, is the central city of the San'in region, and an air of self-sufficient confidence permeates the streets. Neatly arranged buildings including an art museum, historical archives, document archives and the prefectural cultural center on both sides of broad avenues lined with splendid trees, and untouched castle ruins on the hill in the background, grant this prefectural capital a grand appearance. As publicity materials and information on cultural activities are thorough and contain several items relating to Ozaki Midori, I could tell that Midori continues to be loved as a native author.

It would not be hard to benefit from education and culture in Tottori. In fact it seems an enviable environment, where one can enjoy all sorts of events and exhibitions on local writers, painters, ceramic artists, and fabric makers at their art museums and

libraries with a luxury of space unthinkable in a crowded city like Tokyo. Nonetheless, the people of Tottori all lament the city's depopulation, a reality proved by the numbers.

I tried to place the figure of Ozaki Midori among the people who leave Tottori for Tokyo or Osaka. When we think of Japanese modernism during the Taishō and early Shōwa periods, “regional cities” and “Tokyo” are probably the first keywords that come to mind. The migration of people to the city is a long-established phenomenon of modernization both globally and historically. It is both an economic and cultural migration, but unlike the current pattern, in which people, goods, and money (in other words, migration, distribution, and capital and information flow) move via separate routes, a characteristic of modernization was that economic and cultural flow occurs through the large-scale physical migration of human bodies.

The vast majority of modern Japanese literature was produced by writers born in regional cities. Aspiring writers and artists heading for Tokyo tended to be young people who had been groomed and educated in their regional cities and had already begun their creative and expressive activities there, as opposed to those who sought a career in the political or financial worlds and came to Tokyo to enter a private or public university. What such writers and artists longingly sought was not Tokyo as the cultural center of Japan, but a sense of cosmopolitanism and a culture that transcended Japan. This was also to participate in the modern sense of contemporaneity that transcended any particular locality or history. Tokyo was the bridge that connected them to the world and to “modernity.”

Unlike Sōseki's country youth Sanshirō, they were intellectuals from the countryside who despised both provinciality and those privileged, Tokyo-born youths in equal measure. Tokyo was attractive to them because they thought it was the only place in Japan where they could experience that eclectic culture called “modernity”: Tokyo was a pathway to Paris, London, New York, Berlin, and the whole world, a place where all the cultures of the modern world mixed and the latest foreign cultural information was exchanged. I believe they perceived in Tokyo a space where they could envision and write works that transcended Japan.

I had the feeling that it was the ordered daily life of this regional city of Tottori that made Midori impatient and restlessly anxious, and drove her to Tokyo. Tottori is a very bright city. I felt that brightness when I visited the Tottori Dunes and the seaport town where Midori lived; it is because Tottori City faces a sea—a huge sea, the Sea of Japan. I got the strong impression that although Tottori is a regional city far from Tokyo, it faces outward. I felt that it would not be wrong to say that Midori's outward

perspective had been nurtured here. Yet, though Tottori faces outward, it is not at all a cosmopolitan topos. What drove Midori, I thought, was this outward orientation that she shared with other modernist writers that created the phenomena of diaspora, cultural wandering, and writing in exile.

Midori grew up in what might be called the intellectual class of Tottori. Following in the footsteps of her oldest brother Atsurō, her second older brother Tetsurō, and her third older brother Shirō, she advanced to a higher school for women (Tottori Girls' School) as a matter of course, and from there continued in the Supplementary Division, receiving the highest possible level of education for a woman living in a regional city at that time. Her oldest brother graduated from the naval academy as a candidate for high office in the Navy, her second brother entered Ryūkoku University in Kyoto in order to succeed to the leadership of their mother's natal family temple, and her third brother, who had entered the Sixth High School of Okuyama, went on to Tokyo Imperial University to study fertilizers in the Department of Agriculture.

After graduating from the Supplementary Division of Tottori Girls' School at the age of eighteen, Midori took a job as an assistant teacher at Oiwa Normal Elementary School in Iwami County. This required her to leave home and live on her own in a meditation hall that belonged to her grandparents, the Yamanas, in Ajiro Village. This was a necessary step on the path to "modernization" for any child of a father teaching in a regional city. Midori was among a lucky few young women of that time to have benefited from the intellectual environment of her family in her regional city.

In those days, only a small number of women advanced to a women's high school, and Tottori Girls' School was famous for admitting only excellent students and producing the female elite of the region. Women's high schools were provided a "Good Wife and Wise Mother" education, which aimed to produce professionals and upstanding members of society, and above all else, housewives and mothers of the intellectual class equipped with superior cultivation, knowledge, and skills. Although the school by the ruins of Tottori Castle is now a modern building that bears no trace of its appearance in Midori's days, it still has the presence of an elite prefectural high school.

After Midori's family moved to Tottori, their family residence changed several times due to the sudden demise of her father. They lived in Teramachi the longest. As its name suggests, Teramachi had many temples (*tera*) and was laid out in the pattern typical of a feudal castle town. Present day Tottori City retains traces of that feel, but

the district of Teramachi where Midori lived seems to have retained its old atmosphere entirely, though on a small scale. As I walked around the area, the temple walls had the feel of a feudal lord's residence—straight and orderly and bright—with none of the dampness and gloom of ordinary temples or graveyards.

I had the same impression when I visited Yōgenji Temple, the site of Midori's grave. The current priest of Yōgenji Temple is one of Midori's nephews, as her second brother was adopted into the family. He guided me to Midori's grave. Here again I had the impression of "brightness": her tombstone was neither particularly large nor small, and the graveyard itself was not crowded by gravestones. He told me that many people come to visit her gravestone, and I was reminded again that Midori was not forgotten as a writer.

Photos:

Left: The Priest of Yogenji Temple and the author in front of a monument to Midori's literature. (August, 1997)

Right: Yogenji Temple

### **A Bright Landscape**

Tottori is truly bright everywhere in the summer. I'm sure it looks entirely different in the winter, but in the summer this city in the San'in region is permeated with a dry light that differs from the overwhelming sunlight of the tropics. This dry light produces a strange stillness that swathes this magnificent regional city, with its broad central boulevard flanked by prefectural and municipal cultural facilities, and with the castle ruins in the background, making the whole area look like a scene from a film without sound or scent.

I realized that this light-permeated brightness must be due to the fact that it faces the Sea of Japan when I visited Ajiro and the meditation hall of Midori's maternal grandfather, where the young Midori lived as an elementary school teacher after graduating from Tottori Girls' School. Ajiro City (it was a village when Midori lived there) in Iwami County still clearly retains the look of a fishing village. The peaceful fishing port is tidy, and although it must surely have changed quite a bit since Midori's time, it vividly recalls the fisherman's way of life. From the little hill where the meditation hall that Midori lived in stood, one could look out over the sea. This view

made a deep impression on me. I gazed for a seeming eternity into the summer light of the Japanese Sea, thinking this sea, spreading out toward and connecting us with the outside world, would cause anyone, not just Midori, to long for something great and deep, sparkling far off in the distance.

The scene at the Tottori Dunes in *In Search of a Lost Writer* was a wonderful moment in the film, symbolically representing Midori's life and works, but when I visited in August, there were crowds of tourists walking on the dunes under a harsh sun. I tried to imagine the sand dunes on a dark and windy winter night, but it was impossible under such a scorching sun. I walked slowly through the thick sand to the water's edge, feeling close to Midori.

The ocean seems like a sign, a landscape that Midori absorbed deep within herself. That may be because she wrote while gazing at the sea before her when she lived alone for the first time in the meditation hall in Ajiro after leaving her home and family. During this time, the sea must have infiltrated her imagination and taken up residence. Did the ocean, along with her solitude, nurture her longing for modernity and spur her on toward Tokyo and the West?

Yet Midori's "modernity" was not a simple longing for Tokyo. Having obtained a teaching job, Midori had started down a path toward independence that would have been more than enough for many women of her time, but it did not fulfill her. Independence for Midori meant more than the modern woman's goal of economic self-sufficiency, it was the aspiration for self-realization as an expressive writer, an attempt to self-actualize through writing.

It is said that Midori began assiduously reading literary magazines under the influence of her second brother who was then studying Buddhism in Kyoto. Midori wrote short poems and essays and some of these were published in *Bunshō Sekai* (such as "Blue Combs" and "From a New Life in a Fishing Village"). When she was 19, she submitted "Morning" to the prose contest of *Bunshō Sekai* and received first prize, and many of her essays and short stories (including "A Letter of Snow," "Sitting on the Grass," "Evening News," "Awakening," "Dozing Time," "A Heart Seeking Lamentation," and "A Sea-going Heart") were highly evaluated. Along with Yoshiya Nobuko, who had similarly submitted works to *Bunshō Sekai*, she began to receive much attention from readers and critics as a talented woman. Tanizaki Jun'ichiro's "My Feelings Before and After Creative Writing" was published in the same issue as one of Midori's works, and one of her works was awarded a prize along with a submission by Kon Tōkō.

Midori formed a literary coterie magazine, *Suimyaku* (Water current), in Tottori, and submitted "A Time of Lamentation" to a special "women's issue" of *Warera*

(We), but the real launch of her career as a writer began with her submissions to literary magazines in the capital. When *Bunshō Sekai* published “A Women-Centered Theory” by Hiratsuka Akiko (Raichō) in January, 1916, the 20 year-old Midori awakened to the thoughts of the “new women” of *Seitō*. An aspiration to join in new expressive practices was even more strongly embedded in the gaze that Midori directed toward the capital of Tokyo than the desire to become a writer. This aspiration inevitably forced Midori from her regional location and teaching career. This exodus in order to become an expressive creator is itself symbolic of “women’s modernity.” Proclaiming a desire to become an individual, free of her family and the patriarchal home, and establishing an existence through writing and expression were one path toward “modernity” for women.

It is said that Midori distinguished herself in women’s high school, earning excellent grades in subjects like Japanese, science and mathematics, while simultaneously showing deep interest in English and music. Since the Meiji Era, Tottori Girls’ School had been known for its early adoption of music education, and was famous for advanced practices such as holding music concerts open to public. Though she depicts a fantasy world, the balanced sense of Midori’s rhythmic prose and the intellectually detailed symbolism, like line drawings, of her works, produce the strange sense of realism of an optical illusion, akin to musical structure.

Midori’s command of English is well demonstrated by her translation of Poe’s short story, *Morella*, published in 1939 in *Nyonin Geijutsu* (Women’s Art Magazine). Due to her love of Chaplin films, she was also deeply interested in film-making methods. We can assume that such things played a large role in the formation of her literary leanings. For Midori, music, English, and film were all deeply connected to “modernism.”

I returned to Tottori station the day after I visited Midori’s high school and walked through the fishing port where Midori had lived alone in a meditation hall. The magnificent trees lining the avenues and the bright sunshine were the same as when I first arrived. But while I searched for Ozaki Midori in these orderly, bright streets, I could not shake a sense of the uncanny.

This feeling was similar to one I had felt when I visited Boston, more than twenty years ago. Boston is the birthplace of Edgar Allan Poe, a favorite writer of mine. At that time, I was translating the works of Ann Sexton, an American woman poet, who wrote many poems based in Boston. The streets of Boston under the afternoon sun shined like a bright mirror, and as I unintentionally squinted and shaded my eyes against the glare I received a strong shock. This dazzlingly bright June light blanketed

the streets of Boston as though the mysteries of Poe's birth and Sexton's long struggles with poetry, marriage, and neurosis that ended in suicide had never been. This seemed somehow inappropriate to me, or rather, the brightness itself was uncanny.

Photo: Monument to Ozaki Midori's Poetry, Omokage Elementary School, Tottori City

The monument reads:

Unable to forget that face,  
when my soul is in sorrow  
I walk alone  
And cast my thoughts into the field.

Ozaki Midori

Meiji 41 Graduate (1909)