

## 研究ノート

Kōda Aya: “*Atomiyosowaka: Zassō*”  
「あとみよそわか・雑草」“Weeds”  
A Translation

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### Preface

Japanese names are presented in the Japanese order, that is, surname first and given name last. Other Japanese words are italicized except for those generally familiar to the English-speaking reader. The Hepburn system of Romanization has been used, but macrons have been employed to denote long vowels, with the exception of names of well-known people or places such as Tokyo.

### Translation

If my memory serves me right, Kagyūan, our house at Mukōjima, stood on about seven hundred square yards of land. The buildings included the house itself, a study, an outside bathroom, and a storage shed. The unoccupied area was divided up into five parts, the garden in front of my father's sitting room, the entrance way, the part by the living room, the well area and a field where we grew vegetables. It was a completely green garden, lacking in any other colour. It was planted with cypresses, pines, pagoda trees, conifers, amaranth, bamboo, sasa, Thuja pine, and ferns. Honeysuckle and matrimony vine twined themselves around a decorative fence.

My mother had died and up until shortly after my new mother arrived, it must have been when I was about eight or nine; I was often given mental tests to do. One of the questions I was asked was,

“Tell me the names of everything in the garden that's coloured.”

That was an easy one! There were the purple flowers of the snake's beard and its dark blue fruits, the white flowers of the pagoda trees, and the red and green ball-like fruits of the Thuja pine. The flowers

of the matrimony vine were purple and the amaranth was gold and silver. The camellias were the bright red of maple leaves and the honeysuckle was speckled.

This was a particularly easy question but even so I remember being overly praised for being able to answer it and I also remember I received a great deal of credit for this in front of my new mother. I can no longer recall what I got as a reward. Father was not very reliable when it came to rewards. You could get a huge piece of sponge cake for answering something pretty simple when a really hard question might only merit three fruit drops.

Nobody was allowed into the garden unless it was absolutely necessary and even then we were not allowed to go in wearing our ordinary clogs. It was a favourite place of my father's, it seemed, and he would often put on special garden clogs which had thongs made from bamboo sheaths and go for a little stroll around it. Many years ago it seems that Mukōjima had been a beautiful place. These haiku were written with the area in mind.

Broad beans are in bloom  
All along the edges of  
The shining wheat fields.

In the afternoons  
Corn crakes pattering beside  
The Mizogawa

If you sneak a look  
You can see someone having  
A nice quiet drink.

They describe the place exactly. Although I was only little, it is just how I remember it, too. In my memory there remain traces of such tranquil scenes which still stay with me. How the rivers would flood, how the wagtails were not yet uncommon birds and that the soil was purple.

I try to imagine how my father must have felt, standing on land he had bought with his own money, in a house he had designed himself, in good health and with a hardworking wife to boss him about a little, able to enjoy a good drink and with work he could put his heart and soul into. I like to think about my father when he was young and imagine how he spent his mornings and evenings.

Yokichi the gardener and Otoyō the farmer had been friends of his from back then and we children

were close friends, too.

Eventually though, this beautiful place became over-run with small factories, soot and smoke poured out of ugly chimneys and all the wells started to get polluted because of the factories' overuse of the water for their machines. The quality of the soil gradually became poorer and even for my father the quiet life was at an end and it began to affect his work. It seemed that everything, even duty and humanity became touched by a grudging unwillingness. His financial circumstances became pinched and he wearied of the day to day necessity of accounting for every little thing.

His garden shears fell silent and the ladder under the verandah collected cobwebs. His scythe no longer flashed in the garden and we had to fork out good money for something to put in the soup.

Amongst the lustreless trees and disappearing vegetables only my younger brother, Ichirō and I grew more and more vigorous. Ichirō was thin and delicate but in spite of this he always threw himself recklessly into anything and everything without the slightest compunction. I was his elder by three years. I was constitutionally stubborn which I sought to conceal under the cloak of a flexible form of Christianity with which I thought I might be able to gloss over my worst excesses.

Looking at me, my father's only comment was,

"Such solid elbows and knees, just look at the size of you!"

I was indeed a fine, well-covered sixty kilogrammes and there wasn't much in the way of everyday chores that would tire me in the least, so Yokichi and Otoyo were out and Ayako and Ichirō popped up in their place.

The two of us, brother and sister, with towels wrapped around our necks and shabby straw sandals on our feet, were set to work tidying up the garden. Ichirō was given the job of pruning away the superfluous branches of the cypress, and I crawled around in the dirt pulling weeds.

Sewing scissors, traditional Japanese scissors and pliers. Father told us how scissors for cutting flowers were such and such a shape for this and that reason. Pruning shears were made the way they were so as not to slip out of the hand and the edges of the blades were angled in a certain way so that as long as the wood was green, quite a thick branch could be snipped off fairly easily, which he did, to show us how. My brother couldn't do it and Father started grumbling and telling him off.

"No! Don't wrench them like that! Shears have to be specially sharpened and you can't get just anybody to do it. If you blunt them it'll be a real job finding somewhere to get them done!"

I thought it was highly entertaining to listen to my brother getting a telling off but being laughed at by his big sister seemed to annoy him. It was funny to see how hard he was trying to get the hang of the scissors and being scolded at the same time. He just looked down at his toes, unhappily.

Father was extremely careful where sharp-edged instruments were concerned. It didn't matter

whether it was just a vegetable knife or the tool to shave dried fish, whatever it was, he told us, if it was sharp, then you should never, under any circumstances joke around with the person who was holding it in case they took what you said the wrong way and lost their temper. He told us to be especially careful if a person's facial expression changed violently or if it looked like they were about to erupt.

"You know those ladies that teach flower arranging?" he said, "Well some of those old women, you know how they're all shriveled up and wear those old black kimono jackets, well why do you think they make such a performance about showing you how well the scissors have cut the flower stems? It's just to let you know that if anybody said something and went a bit too far then they'd pay for it!"

He said that he had heard that teachers of flower arrangement, carpenters and fishmongers had to go through the same sort of training as people who use swords.

"With garden trees," he said, "the branches that point downwards and sideways are the important ones, the ones that point upwards are not. If the branches are all crowded together, step back about six feet so you can see better before you decide which to cut." By the time I had absorbed all this superficial knowledge it was my turn to do the flower pots.

Although the season had advanced enough for me to be wearing a lined kimono it was as hot as a summer's day. The weeds were coming up all over the garden but thanks to its having been well-looked after for so many years it wasn't as if the weeds had taken over completely. The weeds were short with thin stems and grew flat against the earth. Every year, new garden soil was brought in to replace any that had been washed away, and thoroughly tamped down hard. The little fellows that had worked their way up through the packed earth were much tougher than they looked. The fine roots looked for all the world like they were holding onto the soil as if their life depended on it, and when the weed was pulled out it left a hole.

The secret of weeding was not to move your feet around unnecessarily and to keep a dust pan, a small flat piece of wood and a mallet within reaching distance. Your hands removed all the weeds that could be reached without moving your feet. The weeds, once removed, should be put into the dustpan straightaway and the soil should be made nice and flat again filling in any holes using the piece of wood. If the hole was too big to fill in this way I went to the vegetable patch and took enough soil to fill it in and tamped it down with the mallet.

This particular chore, which could only be accomplished by working slowly, step by tiny step, was exceedingly boring. Weeding the vegetable patch was better because you could use both hands, but this used the just the right hand which got really tired and you had to be really careful and keep your wits about you in the mossy areas. Here carelessness could be the source of future scoldings.

The garden was never swept with a broom.

"There's nothing wrong with a few fallen leaves," said Father, "but being swept with a broom makes the earth so bumpy that it is painful to see."

The most important thing was to get rid of any dead branches and to preserve the quality of the soil. Because he disliked bumpy soil so much, on rainy days he could be seen carting earth about himself to fill in the parts of the garden where the rainwater had collected in puddles or he would call me over and ask,

"Aya! Will you just pop out and mark where that puddle is?"

I would break some cheap, disposable, chopsticks in two and go and poke them in the ground. Usually he would be watching from the verandah. I would be wearing the proper clogs for the garden but even so it was just like treading on thin ice. However carefully I trod, for someone who weighed sixty kilogrammes it was a nerve wrecking experience.

I don't know how proper strips of wood for flattening earth were made, but at our house we used a three-inch strip off the lid of a cake box made of thin cedar wood trimmed off to a triangular point at one end. You used it in either hand to scrape at the soil to make it level. A broom is too soft to make any impression on the soil but the piece of wood was straight and firm enough to scrape down the high bits and fill in the low ones. With a broom, before you know where you are, you've swept up the earth into a small mountain, but with a piece of wood all you are left with are some odds and ends of rubbish and since it is pointed at one end it is very useful for small jobs.

Progress, however was very slow, so after we moved to Koishikawa, Father made a longer tool, a pole with another piece of wood attached to the end like a 'T' that could be used standing up. This pole was extremely unpopular with every single maid we had. Behind his back there were no end of complaints.

"The master is unkind and too hard to please" they said.

People got to hear of it and they were frightened of him. I heard the maids say that it was 'weird' or that it was 'impossible to use' but I never heard anyone who had actually used either the piece of wood or the pole say that afterwards they would recommend it to anybody else.

You couldn't see the effects of either tool after just one day, but in time it became self evident. Particularly, if it happened to be the beginning of spring when the soil was bursting with life, you could see the difference in as little as ten days.

You could be forgiven for thinking that I, even though I was only eleven, fully understood and appreciated the finer points in this matter of the pole or the piece of wood, but in actual fact it was just that in those days, although I grumbled and complained, in the end I had no choice but to obey

orders.

That I wasn't able to appreciate the beauty of properly tended soil until I was thirty, and I had no love for the pole until I was nearly forty, just shows what a fool I was.

Since we moved back last autumn to Kagyūan, that used to be our house before it was burnt down in the war, almost everything I lay my hands on reminds me of my father, but the object that really brings the memories all flooding back is neither the broom nor the floor cloth, but the pole.

If there were just one word to describe Father's personality it would be 'thorough'. He was tenacious to a fault and persisted in doing things right to the bitter end. At times he could be quite repellant in his impetuous, aggressive questioning whereas on other occasions he would adopt a more leisurely but persistent attitude.

Ever since we were small we were accustomed to seeing our father battling with the weeds, a battle which continued right up until his death.

"The sun pours its immeasurable bounty on the crops and makes them grow", he said, "It also causes the weeds to flower" he added in disgust as he pulled out yet another one. I had even seen him swearing at them saying, "Bloody weeds!" and flinging them down on the ground in anger.

One day my brother and I were out walking in the rice fields with Father. The fields had been perfectly tilled as far as the eye could see and a monotonously straight path stretched ahead of us. One spot, however, stood out from the rest. It was thick with wild lettuce, a particularly nasty type of weed that was slowly choking the original rice plants to death. For a long time Father just stood and stared. Although he didn't say a word, he was gritting his teeth so furiously that we could see the shape of them through his cheeks.

Another time he was in the garden with his five-year-old granddaughter, his shoulders broad in his black kimono jacket against her narrow ones, still small enough for the shoulders of her red kimono to be deeply tucked. Both of them were crouched down discussing the radishes.

"This little devil is a real bad'un." he was telling her, "See! When you try to pull it up, just the leaves come away in your hand. Look at that! It's got long, long roots and it's hanging on for all it's worth. What's more, it's really good at making lots of little friends that are exactly the same. Its mates are around here somewhere, I'll bet!"

"Grandpa, here's one! Here, too." she cried.

The spring sunshine was bright on both of their heads. It shone on the white hair of the old man and also on the soft, downy locks of the child.

Soon after that I went to visit my mother-in-law. In her dotage she had settled herself into a corner in the rear of the premises. They were sake merchants, but the business had gone downhill rather badly

and was facing foreclosure. The building itself was a traditional wide-fronted riverside warehouse on the river Shina. The front of the place still looked fine; the old signboard which had served the business well for eight generations still proudly displayed high up on the eaves. The back door was, however, almost off its hinges rusting away due to the unpaid debts. There, shivering not only from the draughts but also the chill winds of scandal, sat poor Grandma. Since it was the house she had been born in, she had nowhere else to go and no-one else to turn to other than her ancestors and the Holy Amitabha. Amen. Amen. On and on she prayed, her back bent from her constant bowing. Her sons simply shrugged and looked up at the ceiling and only talked about things that no longer interested her.

On the contrary, or perhaps because of this, her granddaughter got a welcome fit for a princess. She let herself be petted and said such cute things that Grandma followed her around calling "Tamako! Tamako!" from the time we arrived until we went home and wouldn't leave her alone for a moment. Tamako liked the warehouse which was something she didn't have either at home or at Grandpa's house.

As usual, whilst I was having a word or two with my older brother-in-law, they went off outside, but this time they got caught up in something on their way out on the narrow path between the buildings, and were deep in conversation. I stood stock still and listened. Tamako was innocently explaining to Grandma everything she had learnt from Grandpa. I had noticed before that there was a patch of radish flower seedlings nearby that were coming up thick and fast and Tamako was telling her all about them.

"See this one?" Tamako was saying, "This is the devil. It's bad luck. There's so much here your house will collapse. When that happens, their friends the Shepherd's Purse flowers will come and grow on your roof. My Grandpa said so. At this rate it'll soon be coming up on the roof of the storehouse, won't it?"

That father of mine and this mother-in-law; my little girl too, what were they other than actors on the same stage? And me, too. I was the worst of the lot.

The business on the river Shina went under.

Father always collected up and burnt all the weeds that he had pulled.

"Whatever you do, you'll never get rid of them. All you can do is to make sure that you destroy each and every one you do get by burning them." he said.

Sometimes though, he would be full of praise for them.

"They're remarkable things, weeds are," he would say, "Plucky little fellows!"

Then, without really understanding why, I would feel strangely reassured.

Many years ago, Father said he had been told by an old woman who came to do the weeding to rub salt into the soil after pulling out a weed. I don't remember hearing whether it worked or not. I can understand how stubborn weeds can be but when I listened to him talk about the lengths to which he was prepared to go to eradicate weeds it made me feel afraid for him.

The relationship had lasted for ten years when I finally decided to leave the father of my child. I felt like one of a pair of chestnuts that having been squashed together in the same shell for so long, felt wobbly and off-balance upon finding itself alone. Even before I arrived at the entrance to my father's house I was already feeling lonely, my skin felt chilled and in want of a fire.

This was the figure I presented to my father as he scowled at me from in front of his desk. Even so, I couldn't stop myself from breaking into a little, wild dance. Father understood though. He sympathized with me, put up with me, and grieved for me.

He sat with his left elbow resting on the desk, all the better to modulate his feelings. His right hand rested against his thigh. What an unforgiving figure he presented! I was perfectly aware of all that Father must have known about the situation but all the dictates of morality had not been enough to put a halt to the direction in which my emotions had been flowing.

At the time Father was in the middle of writing a novel. "Ah!" I sighed to myself, and as I remembered that this was just the same father that rubbed salt into the roots of weeds the tears began to pour unchecked down my cheeks. It seemed to be only just the other day that my daughter was talking about Shepherd's Purse, and now here was I, dragging her out of her father's arms. I felt an infinite sadness.

However much I wanted to be rid of them, the memories that stayed with me were of weeds. And salt. Salt. Rub in salt! It seems, however, that while I was simply intent on enduring the pain, unbeknown to me the healing process was slowly but surely getting underway. The salt that was there to kill the weeds was evidently strong enough to put an end to the rot of a decaying relationship too.

My daughter has now reached the age of twenty and I often tell her stories about her father. Issues about who was right and who was wrong faded away as a matter of course and I found myself able to think with compassion and forgiveness about the wounds that we inflicted upon each other. Now if anybody says anything mean and nasty about it I just laugh.

We were made to work in the field, as well. I expect it was because Father was the sort of person who could never be satisfied with an amateur's tools, but the hoe we used was a huge, heavy thing that



a real farmer would have used. Learning to use it properly wasn't something that you could pick up overnight. I was constantly being told by my father that I was awkward and clumsy but luckily for me I was tall and much stronger than other girls of my age so until I got the hang of it I bludgeoned my way through with it by sheer force.

Weight is something that when used properly can halve the effort that a person needs to use to accomplish a task. Father would stroll around in a leisurely fashion in his garden clogs and everyday clothes and make little observations like,

"A farmer's tools are a miracle of dynamics!"

Tilling the soil is hard on the back even for a young person but when I said so his only comment really floored me,

"Therein lies the farmer's strength! You'll just have to put up with it. Keep at it and you'll see!"

I hardly had enough strength to look up. In with the hoe, turn the soil over, one step forward! In with the hoe, turn the soil over, another step forward! I heard the hinges of his study door squeak as he went indoors and, keeping an eye on the house, I took a break.

"I wonder if he's trying to make me into a farmer?" I thought to myself. There wasn't a cloud in the sky which was a deep, deep blue.

I have no idea why he took it into his head to make me do that sort of work. I don't think there was any particularly deep reasoning behind it. My birth mother had been a hard working, assiduous person, so he probably regarded it as just part of the housework. There wasn't as much land as there had been originally so rather like Princess Terute's field they just grew a little bit of this and a little bit of that and in spite of the somewhat restricted size everything was neat and flourishing. As a result, they were never embarrassed by having to pop out and get something from the greengrocer's because of unexpected company. As I was all he had left to remind him of his dead wife, I think he was just trying to instill into me some of her qualities.

Normally in those days, nobody would have dreamt of letting a girl of my age, in the 'flower of her maidenhood' as it were, work in a field with a hoe even if they were having a hard time making ends meet. Whatever people thought of as 'common sense' in those days, though, it would never have crossed my father's mind to let such a thing bother him and for my part, I was a rough and ready sort of child and I just did as I was told. It never occurred to me to dig deeply into what people thought and any talk of that sort just went in one ear and out the other.

There was no school on Saturdays or Sundays and there were those amongst us who kept the Lord's Day holy and went to church and others who skived off and went to see the moving pictures. And then there were some friends of my brother's who, with some other boys would hang about waiting

for a cousin of mine they fancied.

I tilled the soil, alone.

Not that I particularly disliked it, I didn't. Only sometimes when the hoe accidentally hit a toad, I had to close my eyes. Otherwise, I just got on with it. However, I didn't tell my friends about it. Before, when I told them about my cleaning lessons they all gasped and said,

"What! At your house your father teaches you to wash the floors!"

"Really?"

"Not *the* Kōda Rohan?"

I became a butt for their ridicule and curiosity, so much so that I was more shocked than they were. There wasn't any point in telling any of them so I kept it to myself.

My friends didn't find out but one of our visitors was quick to notice things and asked my father about it.

"She's a bit Tolstoyan, you know" he answered and laughed it off. He was joking. Of course, the visitor didn't realize that and probably thought in all seriousness,

"Ah! Naturally! It's only to be expected in the Kōda house."

When I imagine how it must have been, I realize that father still had plenty of tricks up his sleeve.

The only thing I know that is even remotely connected with Tolstoy is the Russian word for the hair-bands we called '*kachusha*' and that he was somehow concerned with the pain of untimely death.

I don't know any more, even to this day. A relative of ours who was a student said one day,

"It's really strange, Ayako. You were brought up in this house and you never read anything."

If anybody had said to me,

"Well, Ayako! Don't you know that?"

I would just have answered,

"You must be joking, of course not!"

At home, with Father always firmly planted nearby keeping a sharp look out, nothing could be further from my thoughts than whether Tolstoy said his prayers or not or the ins and outs of the philanderings of somebody so distant as Maupassant.

A changeable and selfish man, peace and quiet wouldn't last even three days before we would be turned upside down by gales and squalls. It was exhausting. The last thing I wanted to do was read. The way we lived, I needed the time to catch up on my sleep. I am well aware that I am no use whatsoever, but you should try being a child in this house!

It was one of the great indisputable truths, like dyers always wore white and hairdressers always wore their hair in a special twist, Ayako was innocent of all learning. I hadn't even read my father's

books so when anybody mentioned the editing of his 'complete works' I just frowned darkly. Being ignorant isn't a good thing under any circumstances and my father told me,

"The reason you are stupid is that you don't read."

We planted beans in the field and my job was to do the easiest ones which were soy beans. They did really well. When we picked the first ones Father was overjoyed and got drunk and while he was drinking he wrote a song for me. It was about what a good girl I was, but I've completely forgotten now how it went.

Father ate most of the beans himself. A mole had some, too. When he went out one morning and saw the mess of empty pods left by the mole he got angry and picked every bean that was left. He had them for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Beans were his favourite food. Starting in the spring with peas and going right through to the autumn moon viewing when we fried up the old beans that were left over, they appeared on our table everyday. Most things, however delicious they are become 'too much of a good thing' after a while, but where beans were concerned, in my father's case it was 'the more the merrier' and he always held out his plate for 'seconds', which was very foolish of him.

He was a diabetic and when the level of his blood sugar rose he was put on a restricted diet. On these occasions he would wolf down the rice and beans, which were plain, boiled, green soy beans, and soon we would see an improvement in his test results. The very next day he would start drinking again and eating rich foods like *tempura* and eels.

"The word 'balanced' doesn't just mean that both sides of the scales should be constantly level," he explained, "if the right hand scale goes up the left hand one goes down. If you make the right hand one go down then the left hand one comes up. That way both sides balance each other."

He continued this see-sawing between diabetes and beans till the day he died.

He loved beans so much it was like a religion with him. If anybody ever gave me any he was always delighted. Whenever the expression, 'when you boil beans, do it with the pods on' crosses my mind it brings back a flood of memories. Generally speaking, boiling beans is easy; trying to make them taste good without even using salt is the difficult thing.

"There is no science in the Japanese kitchen, so although one may see examples of virtuosity, in general it is very backward." he said, and ordered a foreign cookery book from Maruzen the booksellers. I wasn't able to read it. Weights, cooking times and temperatures were conscientiously tabled; obviously the results of a vast amount of experience. On one page, I was amazed to see a detailed description of the process of boiling something from the raw state and the changes that could

be observed.

“When you boil beans you should be more scientific about it.” he said, “In America I expect they count each and every bean before they dry them or boil them.

“And another thing, the reason I so carefully savour the taste of the beans you cook is to add to your knowledge.”

To this day, I am unable to forget the picture he made, his moustache bobbing furiously as he munched away at the American beans we had received in our rations.

Thanks to having been made to work in the field, I was able to make the acquaintance of Higuchi Ichiyō's younger sister, the former Higuchi Kuniko. My family had met her through her sister and she was an old friend who knew of the death of my mother and that I now had a step-mother.

She was very fair-skinned and slim with a high-bridged nose and red lips, beautiful in a very Western way. At the neck of her kimono she had added a men's black inner lining. Her clogs were made from extremely fine-grained wood, hollowed out at both the heel the toe and with white thongs. She dressed with great chic but with an elegance that was both simple and refreshing. Every year she came always loaded down with presents to exchange formal greetings at the summer *Bon* period and at the end of the year.

She spoke with an attractive elegance on the comings and goings of literary personages and discussed the merits and demerits of their works. She had an interesting way of looking at life and talked about things in a lively manner. She had a daughter the same age as I was, so she didn't miss the sight of the 'land girl' just visible through the shrubbery. As soon as she caught a glimpse of me she pulled open the gate that separated the field from the entrance-way and came over to me her face wreathed in smiles and her feet encased in their white *tabi*.

Friendly and sociable, she gaily went through the niceties of our 'how-do-you-dos' and then stopped and looked me up and down two or three times. I was deeply embarrassed as she took in my muddy hands and feet.

All of a sudden she crouched down and said,

“I think you're wonderful. I don't know how you put up with it. Your father, your step-mother, you know what they're like. Try to be patient. Your mother was a very hard worker too, so please, just do what you can.”

She didn't tell me to do my best or anything like that and all of a sudden my hand was being pressed between her two white ones and as I looked up, I could see a tear making its way down the side of her beautiful nose.

"Mind you don't get injured and please take the very best care of yourself." she said and bowed. She turned to go and with her back turned to me she continued,

"Don't bother to see me off, stay where you are and carry on with what you were doing"

I had hardly said a thing, I just stood there. What had made her cry? Just the sight of me working couldn't have made her sad and I couldn't think of anything else that could have made her feel so sorry for me. Even so, I can't deny that her kind words made me feel better. On the other hand I was still cocky enough to hate it when people took pity on me for having to work in the field and started on the old step-child-wicked step-mother sob story, and I was obliged to hold my tongue.

Unfortunately, as a result of this poor Miss Higuchi become rather unpopular with my step-mother and when she came to the house for advice, particularly on the works of her sister Ichiyō, Mother often became contradictory. Having been buffeted by the grim realities of life she could be very sharp at times, and each time Miss Higuchi appeared, the knack that she had of just letting whatever people said go in one ear and out of the other completely deserted her.

After that, until she moved to a house nearby in Koishikawa, there weren't any important discussions, but I listened very carefully to what she had to say and the special softness that she possessed as a result of being a mother influenced me a great deal.

"Very clever woman, that!" said Father.

"Splendid nose. Magnificent!"

Father's nose, of course, was completely flat.

At one time, Father started growing chrysanthemums. Of course he was his usual out and out, thorough, exhaustive self and my brother and I got dragged into it. He foraged amongst his books and read everything he could lay his hands on. He went and asked people, he got the nursery-man over, the roots he obtained from an organization in Akita, the flower-pots, the leaf mould, the chemical fertilizer, the ring supports; it went on and on.

He stopped growing vegetables and the field was turned over to the chrysanthemums and my brother and I gave up our hoes and were put in charge of manure spreading. Ichirō rose up in revolt. His lips set in a firm, stubborn line and he complained to father's face.

"Not me. No fear! I'm not doing that!"

Father cut him down to size.

"When you're behaving yourself you're a real prince, but as soon as you open your mouth and speak with that expression on your face you're like the devil himself. It's a very unpleasant way to look. You know what people who defy their parents are called, don't you? 'Shit carriers', that's what!"

In the end there was nothing for it but for me to take over so I said to Ichirō, who had by now reached new heights of outrage,

“You just have to help carry one. If you do that then you can go off and play wherever you like.”

That did the trick. He said,

“It’s not fair for you to have to do it all, I’ll do one then.”

I always got the worst of Ichirō’s strange ideas of ‘fairness.’

Father’s demands for the job turned out to be really elaborate. We dug a shallow hole about one foot deep and three feet square. This was covered with old woven bamboo blinds which were pegged down at the four corners. Then we were to start sieving the liquid manure through them. Easy enough to say, but a really awful job to have to do. Digging a hole was nothing. We had a dipper, but, more important, no bucket. Father still hadn’t got over his run in with Ichirō so he was still in a bad mood and started picking on me.

“Can’t you find something else to make do with, stupid?” he said angrily.

Normally he would tell us,

“Taking your anger out on somebody else who’s got nothing to do with it is a very low thing to do.”

By this time I was seething. I knocked the lid out of a soy sauce barrel and tied a rope to it to make a handle. I crawled underneath the verandah and dragged out a thin pole and chopped a bit off the end with a hatchet to shorten it. All three of us were furious with each other.

Getting my kimono dirty would be the last straw so I backed off as far as I could to the edge of the hole. The barrel was filled to the brim and the liquid gold played an eternal melody as it lapped against the sides.

We slipped the pole through the rope handle and I stood up first holding up my end of the pole. Then Ichirō yelled out, “All right ahead?” as if he was acting in a play and I began to see the funny side of things. Of course, these sudden changes of mood came from my father. Both of us were just like him in this respect.

It was the first time that we had carried anything strung on a pole between us and we weren’t very good at it. It was also quite heavy. As I was in front I couldn’t see what was happening behind me but Ichirō, like the fool he was, kept up a running commentary of grunts and exclamations whenever the barrel looked like it was going to overflow.

We had to come around from the back of the house and go through the garden to get to the field, and our procession was marked by a great figure of eight of spilt manure cutting a swathe through the property.

The first trip went off alright as did the second, and we were just nearing the end of the third and

waddling our way through the garden when the 'boss' appeared.

"Straighten up those backs!" he yelled and burst into laughter. That started me off and although I tried to control myself, I couldn't stop laughing and for some reason all the strength left my legs and I started to stagger and lose my balance.

"Oh, no! God help us!" he shouted, and leapt out of the way. The whole place stank to heaven and the three of us collapsed in gales of laughter and nobody was angry anymore. Together we dug a ditch as far as the cypress tree and sluiced the whole place down.

In the autumn the field was a sight to behold. The leaves had had a bit too much fertilizer and had split and curled up. The stems shot up one and two feet above the hedge and even the bamboo sticks we used for cucumbers were not long enough for them. The red, white and yellow flowers were no bigger than a tiny pickle dish and we could hear passers-by say uncertainly, "Those flowers look a bit like chrysanthemums." The nursery-man just mumbled but Father looked up at the sky every morning and said, "The Chinese are a very sophisticated people, and nobody can prove that they have never written poetry about extremely tall chrysanthemums", and looked everywhere for an example.

And that was that really, and this is the end except for one thing, the following year the field was full of every type of chrysanthemum imaginable: tubular petalled, spoon petalled, pom-poms, spider-like blooms with thread-like petals and those which flowered in cascades. The whole field just blazed with colour.

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Research Note

Kōda Aya: “*Atomiyosowaka: Zassō*”  
「あとみよそわか・雑草」 “Weeds”  
A Translation

Susan M. Williams

This paper is the fifth of an on-going study of the early works of Kōda Aya (1904-1990) and is a translation of the essay “*Zassō*” (Weeds) which forms part of the long memoir “*Atomiyosowaka*” (Fingers Crossed). These have been chosen from the collection of essays entitled “*Konna Koto*” (This Sort of Thing) principally because it was felt that they most clearly reveal the relationship between Aya and her father.