

# KENNY&

THE GINSBERG OF JAPAN



Three Original Manuscripts  
By  
Kazuko Shiraishi

The Japanese "Beat" Poet

Code: K&JBP

## Introduction

*"Kazuko Shiraishi is certainly the outstanding poetic voice of her generation of disengagement in Japan. And there is certainly no woman poet of this kind anywhere near as good elsewhere in the world. ...Her peers are Dylan Thomas and Volsky", Donald Keene said about the artist.*

Is this all there is to say about Kazuko Shiraishi? Far from it. It does however show her significance in the world of literature.

Born in Vancouver, Canada, she moved with her parents to Japan after World War II. In 1948, Kazuko Shiraishi joined a group of avant-garde poets led by Katsue Kitazano called VOUE.

Soon, Kazuko established herself in the scene of poetry, dreading taboos and breaking them. She went through with various genres and invented a new form of poetry reading – the so-called "performance"-style.

In the late 1950s, Kazuko became part of the Beat Generation, an American poetry movement, which merges, live jazz with poetry reading and which was the first to openly address sensitive issues such as sex, drugs and poverty. During the 60s, she either read her poetry during jazz concerts or was accompanied by jazz musicians such as Sam Rivers, Leo Smith and Itaru Oki to name a few.

To this day, Kazuko receives invitations for poetry reading worldwide: Rotterdam, Jerusalem, Warsaw and Medellín were just some of her stopovers. She never misses out on an opportunity to perform at jazz festivals. With each performance, she demonstrates how word and music can melt together and produce intensity. In her desire to bring the Beatniks to the Japanese people, Kazuko Shiraishi translated Allen Ginsberg's work for their benefit. Ginsberg, in exchange, put her into English and exposed her to the Western world. Together they organised readings and performances. Both poets were so close to each other that Ginsberg once commented; "We may as well be husband and wife!"

The literary similarities between her poems and short stories to the literature of the Beat Generation prompted her friend and poet Kenneth Rexroth to call Kazuko "the Allen Ginsberg of Japan."

In 50 years, she wrote 20 volumes of poetry and stories. Some of her poems were put in film. This in itself amazing when you consider the fact that modern poetry is often regarded to be hardly accessible. Kazuko never settles for the word alone. Images, music, language – the translation from one media to another, the connection of various genres and media; all of that is Kazuko Shiraishi's goal – and she seeks to get that across to the whole world.

## Biography

Kazuko Shiraishi was born in Vancouver, Canada in 1931 and was taken to Japan by her family just prior to World War II. She entered the modernism poetry group VOU led by a poet, Katsue Kitazano in 1948, and published her first collection of poetry in 1951. In the early 1960s she started reading her poems in live jazz performances, some of which were filmed. Her publications include many poetry books like "Seasons of Sacred Lust" (with numerous printings in Japan and the U.S. ). "Isso no canoe, mirai e modoru" ("A Canoe Returns to the Future"), "Sunozoku" ("Sand Clan"), "Moero meiso" ("Burning Meditation"), "Hira hira hakobarete ikumono" ("One Who is Carried Off, Fluttering"), "Arawareru mono tachi wo shite" ("Let Those Who Appear"), "Roba no kichou na namida" ("Precious Tears of The Donkey") as well as volumes of essays on music, art and movie. Her poems have been translated into many languages; they have been published in the U.S.A., in Germany (recently "Odysseus heute" 2001), Korea, Mexico and other countries.

She has been invited to readings all over the world, including poetry festivals, e.g. Rotterdam (on several occasions), Jerusalem, Manila, Murcia, London, Hamburg, Durban, Vancouver, Warsaw, Medellin, and jazz festivals in Moers and Wuppertal. She also organised poetry evenings with poets like Allen Ginsberg and Jehuda Amichai, whose works she has also translated. She has performed with musicians, dancers and artists, e.g. Kazuo Ono, Peter Broetzmann, Sam Rivers, Itaru Oki and Aki Takase. She received many major Japanese poetry literary prizes including the prestigious Yomiuri Literary Prize and also the honour of a Purple Ribbon Medal (Shijuhosho). Kazuko Shiraishi lives in Tokyo.

## Regarding The Future Of The Donkey

Regarding the future the donkey contemplates after this century  
What sort of century will come then  
How will the donkey's ears be useful  
Will poetry be peacefully prosperous or  
Hang on to the ears of hell panting burning fiercely the fire of energy that  
Rides the rising air current  
Gods ease the discontent of those who call themselves absolute  
Buddha closed his eyes a little while ago  
I am not sleeping says every time he gets drowsy  
And he wakes up without fail by looking at a beautiful woman  
And screams that Flowers bloom in this world but  
The donkey opens a hole in the ant hill looking  
Everyone plugs their ears reading their own sutras inside many layered enclosures  
Gradually becoming ants gradually becoming soil  
Begins to hear a god like voice from somewhere  
Saying what is called the future is  
Not yet loaded onto your back

Kazuko Shiraishi

The title poem from Shiraishi's 1996 book which received three prestigious awards in Japan – the Yomiuri Literature Award, The Takami Jun Poetry Award and the very special Purple Ribbon Medal from the Emperor of Japan.

## Manuscripts

**1. Shiraishi, Kazuko.-** Cuttack. Yume ha Senī de dekite-iru (Dreams are made of Fiber).

Manuscript written in black ink, 44 leaves of copy paper for 400 letters, signed. This work firstly contained in a literary magazine "Umi (Sea)" August 1978, and same year published in book form "New selected poems of Kazuko Shiraishi".  
Cuttack is the former capital and one of the oldest cities of Orissa, India.

**2. Shiraishi, Kazuko.-** OH California.

Manuscript written in black ink, 23 leaves of copy paper for 400 letters, signed.  
Long poem, publication is not yet identified.

**3. Shiraishi, Kazuko.-** Seirei Tachi no Shima. (An Island of Spirits)

Manuscript written in black ink, 44 leaves of copy paper for 400 letters, signed. The title changed from "Yon-hiki no kyodai-na kuroi Inu-tachi (4 big black dogs)" . This work firstly contained in a literary magazine "Umi (Sea)" June, 1979 and published as Hawaii Island; lead by 4 big black dogs" in a book "Labyrinthos; muttsu-no Seirie yobu Tochi yori (Labyrnth; from six lands of Spirits)" (1983), together with other 5 travel pieces.

## Additional Information

The following introduction by Gary Snyder is from *Stumbling Earth* by Tetsuo Nagasawa.

"Nagasawa Tetsuo. A poet of laconic, enigmatic, experimental poetry. I have kept up with what I could through the years. Naga we call him, in Sanskrit, a magic giant and underworld serpent of wisdom, sometimes a dragon. He is an open-boat commercial fisherman living far south in the Tokara retto, in the shadow of volcanoes, in the East China Sea. He is tough as a whip, no wasted words.

Allen Ginsberg was staying at my place in Kyoto, on his way back to California from India, in the summer of 1963. Naga turned up at our door. He was together with Nanao. They had sought us out and we had heard of them. We spent a day talking and walking and for a while just sitting on the banks of the Kamo River, sharing stories and poetics. That meeting with Naga and Nanao was an opening that led, for me, to connections with the larger Japanese counterculture, travels to the islands.

Allen went back to North America, but I continued living in Japan. I met Cap and May and P-co and Pon. Though many of these new friends wrote poems, Naga was one of the few who really stayed with it. I introduced his work to the North American scene in a special issue of a little Oregon magazine of which I was the guest editor. It came out in 1964. A few of those poems were rich in magical syllables, no known human language, "sound poetry", with its own vibrations and auras. Naga has been one of the purest experimentalists and quietly stubborn experimenters. He hangs out at the cliff where language stops at the edge of emptiness.

Some of us went one summer to the southern archipelago, worked in the sweet potato fields and bamboo groves and finished off the edge of the reef. We eventually came back to the mainlands of the world. Naga stayed, made a home and had a family, became a village member and a commercial fisherman.

But in recent years he has been occasionally coming up to Honshu. A few years back Naga and I read together in downtown Tokyo, in the old temple of Confucius, Yushima Seido. There was a huge crowd of young people, the guitar playing of Uchida Bobu, Nanao and other poets. After that it was great to go into the Nagano-ken Mountains with naga for a few days. We talked a lot about old times, and our ongoing lives – many of us still walking a counterculture path.

Naga has learned a great deal from archaic tribal Japan, from India, from fearless modernist experiment, and from his hard work. His poems feel like windy seas pray in the face and they taste like uni. I greatly respect this man and his long focus, a practice of work, attention and vision.

Gary Snyder  
January 2003