

## Atomic Bomb Poems

Kyoko Selden

Edited and translated by Kyoko Selden



Hiroshima after the atomic bomb

炎ノ街

**Honō No Machi**

**City in Flames**

中村温

**Nakamura On**

青白いキラメキト黒イ太陽ト  
 Aojiroi kirameki to kuroi taiyō to  
 Under a pale blue glow, the black sun,  
 死ンダ向日葵ノ花ト崩レタ屋根ノ下デ  
 shinda himawari no hana no kuzerta yane no  
 shita de  
 dead sunflowers, and a collapsed roof,  
 人人ハ声モナク顔ヲアゲタ  
 hito bito wa koe mo naku kao o ageta  
 people lifted their faces voicelessly:  
 ソノ時見交サレタ血ミドロノ眼  
 sono toki mikawasareta chi midoro no me  
 bloody eyes that exchanged looks then  
 ズルムケノ皮膚  
 zurumuke no hifu  
 loosely peeling skin  
 茄子ノ様ニフクレタ唇  
 nasu no yō ni fukureta kuchibiru  
 lips swollen like eggplants  
 硝子の刺サッタ頭

garasu no sasatta atama  
 heads impaled with shards of glass—  
 《コレガ人間ノ顔デアルワケガアロウカ》  
 “kore ga ningen no kao de aru wake ga arōka”  
 “how can this be a human face”  
 誰モガ他人ノ顔ヲ見テソウ思ッタ  
 daremo ga tanin no kao o mite sou omotta  
 everybody thought at the sight of another  
 ダガソ思ッタ人ノ顔モソウナッテイタ  
 daga sou omotta hito no kao mo sou natteita  
 yet each who so thought had the same face.  
 炎ガヤガテ街ヲツツンデイク  
 Honō ga yagate machi o tsutsundeiku  
 Flame soon wrapped the city  
 或ル家デハ母親ト七歳ノ女ノ子ダケガ居タ  
 aru ie de wa hahaoya to nanasai no onnanoko  
 dake ga ita  
 at one house there were only a mother and a  
 seven-year-old girl  
 屋根ノ下敷キデ母親ハ動ケナクッタ  
 yane no shita jiki de hahaoya wa ugokenakatta  
 crushed under the roof; the mother could not  
 move  
 女ノ子ダケガ助カッタ  
 onnanoko dakega tasukatta  
 the girl alone survived.  
 女ノ子ガ柱ヲ動カソウトシテ居タ時  
 onnanoko ga hashira wa ugokasō to shite ita  
 toki  
 while the girl was trying to move a pillar  
 炎ハソコニモヤッテ来タ  
 honō wa soko ni mo yatte kita  
 the flames came there too.  
 《オ前ダケ逃ゲナサイ》  
 “omae dake nigenasai”  
 “Go on without me,”  
 母親ハ自由ニナル片腕デ  
 hahaoya wa jiyū ni naru kata ude de  
 the mother, with her free arm,

ソノ子ヲ押シヤッタ  
 sono ko o oshiyatta  
 pushed the child away.  
 恐怖ノ叫ビ声サエモ出ズ  
 kyōfu no sakebi goe sae mo dezu  
 Without even uttering a cry of horror,  
 西カラモ東カラモ  
 nishi kara mo higashi kara mo  
 toward the place without flames  
 ズルムケノ裸形ノ  
 zurumuke no hadaka no  
 from the west and from the east  
 男カ女カモワカラヌ  
 otoko ka onna ka mo wakaranu  
 naked figures their skin loosely peeling:  
 幽霊ノ行列ガ続イタ  
 yūrei no gyōretsu ga tsuzuita  
 you couldn't tell men from women,  
 ソノ様ナ中デ  
 sono yō na naka de  
 a procession of ghosts continued; in the middle  
 of all this,  
 突然  
 totsuzen  
 suddenly  
 行列ノ中ノ老婆ガ立チドマリ  
 gyōretsu no naka no rōba ga tachidomari  
 an old woman in the procession stopped,  
 ホドケタ帯ノ様ナモノヲタグッテイタ  
 hodoketa obi no yō na mono o tagetteita  
 pulling in something like a sash that was  
 coming off  
 炎ハモウソコ迄キテイルノニ!  
 honō wa mō soko made kiteirunoni!  
 when the flames had already come so close!  
 見カネター人が言ッタ  
 mikaneta hitori ga itta  
 Someone, unable to take it any longer, said,  
 《オ婆サン ソンナモノハ捨テテ早く行キマシヨ  
 ウ》  
 “obāsan sonna mono wa sutete hayaku iki  
 mashou”  
 “Come, throw that away, let’s hurry.”  
 スルト老婆ハ答エタ  
 suruto rōba wa kotaeta  
 then she answered,  
 《コレハ私の腸ナノデス》  
 “kore was watashi no chō nano desu”

“These are my intestines.”

声なきものへ  
**Koe naki mono e**  
**To The Voiceless**  
 山田数子  
**Yamada Kazuko**

なんぼうにも  
 Nanbō ni mo  
 No matter what you say  
 むごいよ  
 mugoi yo  
 it is cruel  
 みんなにもうわすれられて  
 minna ni mō wasurarete  
 already forgotten by everyone  
 埋もれてしまった  
 umorete shimatta  
 and buried away  
 ほとけたら  
 hotoketara  
 are the buddhas  
 ほとたらかしの  
 hottarakashi no  
 left alone  
 ほとけたち  
 hotoketachi  
 are the buddhas  
 なんぼうにも  
 nanbō ni mo  
 no matter what you say  
 むごいよ  
 mugoi yo  
 it is cruel  
 月のかたぶくばんには  
 tsuki no katabuku ban ni wa  
 on a night when the moon inclines  
 ゆうれいになってやってこい  
 yūrei ni natte yattekoi  
 come over as ghosts  
 母さんとはなそうよ  
 kāsān to hanasou yo  
 talk with your mom

let’s talk, with our backs turned

失なったものに  
**Ushinata mono ni**  
**To the Lost**

山田数子

**Yamada Kazuko**

びわの花がさいたら

Biwa no hana ga saitara

When loquats bloom

ももやまのももがさいたら

momoyama no momo ga saitara

when peach blossoms in the peach mountain bloom

はらんきょうが小指の先になったら

harankyō ga koyubi no saki ni nattara

when almonds are as big as the tips of the little finger

おまえたち

omaetachi

my boys

もどってきてくれ

modotte kite kure

please come.

The following two poems were composed in 1952 by primary school students.

げんしばくだん

**Genshi bakudan**

**The Atomic Bomb**

坂本はつみ

**Sakamoto Hatsumi**

げんしばくだんがおちると

Genshi bakudan ga ochiru to

When the atomic bomb drops

ひるがよるになって

hiru ga yoru ni natte

day turns into night

人はおばけになる

hito wa obake ni naru

people turn into ghosts.

無題

**Mudai**

**Untitled**

田尾絹江

**Tao Kinue**

ばくだんがおちたあと

bakudan ga ochita ato

After the bomb dropped

おかあちゃんが

okaachan ga

mom says

だいじにのけといた米を炊きながら

daiji ni noketoita kome o takinagara

boiling rice she carefully saved

せんそうをして

sensō o shite

“what’s so fun about

なにがおもしろいんだろう

nani ga omoshiroindarō

making war”

とって、

to itte,

she said

たかしゃ たかしゃ

Takashi-a Takashi-a

“Takashi my son, Takashi my son

まめでかえってくれと

mame de kaette kure to

please come back healthy”

いってなきながら

itte naki nagara

she cries

おむすびをつくる。

omusubi o tsukuru

making rice balls.

大臣のうた

**Daijin no uta**

**Song of the Prime Minister**

岡本潤

**Okamoto Jun**

死の灰がどんなに散ら貼ろうと

Shi no hai ga donna ni chirabarō to

However much deadly ashes scatter

汚れた雨がどんなに降ろうと

kegareta ame ga donna ni furō to

However much polluted rain falls

学者がなんといおうと

gakusha ga nan to iō to

whatever scholars say

人民どもがどんなにさわごうと

jinmin domo ga donna ni sawagō to

whatever hubbub the populace makes

大臣はアチラむき  
daijin wa achira muki  
the minister's face turns "over there" and  
greet  
—どうぞ どうぞ 御遠慮なく  
—dōzo dōzo goenryō naku  
—please, please, anything you like.  
ベーター線  
bētā sen  
Beta rays  
ガンマー線  
ganmā sen  
gamma rays  
もやもやの放射能雲が列島をおおい  
moya moya no hōshanō gumo ga rettō o ooi  
nebulous radioactive clouds over the  
archipelago  
魚類も家畜も野菜も草木も  
gyorui mo kachiku mo yasai mo kusaki mo  
fish cattle vegetable trees and grass  
鉛いろにどろんとなり  
namari iro ni doron to nari  
all turn into a leaden soggy mass  
老若男女が海坊主に化そうと  
rōnyaku danjo ga umi bōzu ni kasō to  
young and old, men and women turn into sea  
monsters, even then  
大臣さんはアチラまかせ  
daijin san wa achira makase  
the minister leaves it up to those "over there"  
—どうぞ どうぞ 御遠慮なく  
dōzo dōzo goenryō naku  
—please, please, anything you like.  
もはや女も男も  
mohaya onna mo otoko mo  
Now no woman no man  
人間の形をしたものはいない  
ningen no katachi o shita mono wa inai  
has a human shape  
列島はカキ殻の破片  
rettō wa kakigara no hahen  
the islands are shattered fragments of oyster  
shells  
方角もなく骨灰のまう  
hōgaku mo naku kokkai no mau  
an eroded desert  
風化沙漠  
fūka sabaku

where bones and ashes dance directionless  
さまよう大臣の亡霊が  
samayō daijin no bōrei ga  
the wandering ghost of the minister  
どこかでオケラのように啼いている  
dokoka de okera no yō ni naiteiru  
is singing somewhere like a marsh cricket  
—どうぞ どうぞ 御遠慮なく  
—dōzo dōzo goenryō naku  
—please, please, anything you like.

### Tanka from Hiroshima

無造作に殺されし人を無造作にかき集めて柵火  
にふすかも  
Muzōsa ni korosareshi hito o muzōsa ni kaki  
atsumete hotabi ni fusukamo  
Those killed without ceremony we gather  
without ceremony and place in the bonfire  
佐々木豊  
Sasaki Yutaka

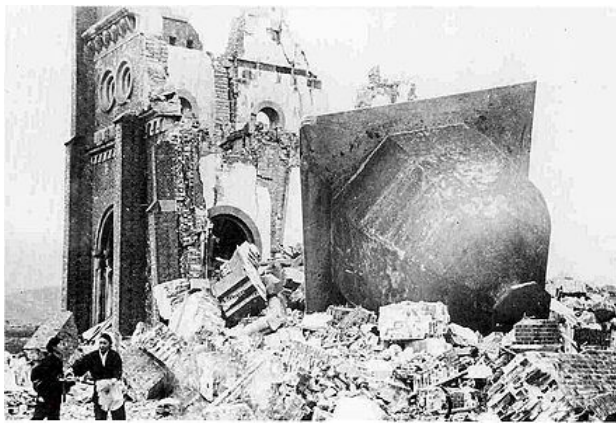
少年の屍と見れば顔よせて吾子ならじかと覗き  
ては行く  
Shōnen no kabane to mireba kao yosete ako  
narajika to nozokite wa yuku  
Each time I see a boy's body I bring my face  
close to see if he's my boy as I travel in search  
益田美佐子  
Masuda Misako

声涼しくアリランの唄歌いたる朝鮮乙女間なく  
死にたり  
Koe suzushiku Ariran no uta utaitaru chosen  
otome manaku shinitari  
Voice serene she sang the song of Arirang the  
Korean maiden was soon dead  
神田満寿  
Kanda Masu  
□ "Arirang" is a popular Korean folksong.

手を合わせ水欲るともにやらざりし我が終生悔  
恨となる  
Te o awase mizu horu tomo ni yazarishi waga  
shūsei kaikon to naru  
Palms joined my friend asked for water that I

gave none has become my lifelong regret  
Kono Chizuko

でて虫のごとく地を這い水求む生きし地獄は児  
らに告げ得ず  
Detemushi no gotoku chi o hai mizu motomu  
ikishi jigoku wa kora ni tsuge ezu  
Snail-like I crawled on the ground and sought  
water about that living hell I cannot tell my  
children  
Kamamoto Misaki



**Ruins of Urakami Cathedral, Nagasaki,**  
[Wikicommons.](#)

### Tanka from Nagasaki

茫漠の瓦礫の中に天主堂に一夜明かしぬ神をあ  
げつらひ  
Bōbaku no gareki no naka ni tenshudō ni ichiya  
akashinu kami o agetsurahi  
In the cathedral in the ruins of boundless  
expanse I stayed one night criticizing God  
Suga Takashi

白血球すくなきわれを眩しませ若葉木さわぐ風  
に揉まれて  
Hakkekkyū suku naki ware o mabushimase  
wakaba ki sawagu kaze ni momarete  
White blood cell count is low dazzling my eyes  
young leaves rustle tossed in the wind

Mihara Hanako

原爆の跡かたもなき彦山を染めて早々陽は昇る  
なり  
Genabaku no atokata mo naki Hikosan o  
somete sōsō yō wa noborunari  
No trace of the atomic bomb dyeing Mount  
Hiko morning after morning the sun rises  
Matsumoto Sueko

爆心地にちかく埃をあびて咲く地藏の前の赤き  
曼珠沙華  
Genbakuchi ni chikaku hokori o abite saku jizō  
no mae no akaki manjushage  
Near the hypocenter blooms in dust in front of  
Jizō a red heavenflower  
Moriuchi Masa

### Haiku from Hiroshima

一口のトマトに笑み少年早や死骸  
Hitokuchi no tomato ni emi shōnen haya  
mukuro  
A smile at a bite of tomato the boy is already a  
corpse  
屍体裏返す力あり母探す少女に  
Shitai uragaesu chikara ari haha sagasu shōjo  
ni  
Strength to turn a body in a girl who looks for  
her mother  
柴田杜代  
Shibata Moriyo

ひろしまは光げのないしろいしろい街  
Hiroshima wa hikarige no nai shiroi shiroi  
machi  
Hiroshima is without light a white white city

Shoji Tokie

孤児の掌の螢は強く明滅  
Koji no tenohira no hotaru wa tsuyoku  
meimetsu  
Firefly in an orphan's hands powerfully  
glimmer on and off  
Taruma Yoshikazu

平和祭かゝはりなしと靴磨く

Heiwa matsuri ka harinashi to kutsumigaku  
 Peace festival none of my business I shoeshine  
 Numata Toshiyuki

神はっと眼をそむけたり八時十五分  
 Kami hatto me o somuketari hachiji jūgo fun  
 God suddenly averted His eyes at 8:15  
 Fujikawa Genshi

Christians  
 Takenaka Jakutoh

掌の蟻をつまみ被曝の地にもどす  
 Tenohira no ari o tsumami hibaku no chi ni  
 modosu  
 Picking up the ant on my palm I put it back on  
 the bombed land  
 Uesugi Ryusuke

### Haiku from Nagasaki

浜木綿やこの地に多きかくれ耶蘇  
 Hamayuu ya kono chi ni ooki kakure yaso  
 Sand flowers on this land were many secret

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**Kyoko Selden** (1936-2013) taught Japanese language and literature as a senior lecturer at Cornell University until her retirement in 2008. Author, translator, artist and calligrapher, she was the translation coordinator of the Asia-Pacific Journal. Her major works as translator centered on Japanese women writers, the atomic bomb, the Ainu and the Okinawans. Her major translations included [Japanese Women Writers: Twentieth Century Short Fiction](#), [More Stories By Japanese Women Writers, An Anthology](#), Kayano Shigeru's [Our Land Was a Forest](#), Honda Katsuichi's [Harukor: Ainu Woman's Tale](#), [The Atomic Bomb: Voices From Hiroshima and Nagasaki](#), Shin'ichi Suzuki's [Nurtured by Love](#), and Cho Kyo's [The Search for the Beautiful Woman, A Cultural History of Japanese and Chinese Beauty](#).