

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カッタ

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
ョウ》
“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
ほったらかしの
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
kāsan to hanasou yo
talk with your mom

let's talk, with our backs turned

失なったものに
Ushinatta 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”
といって、
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

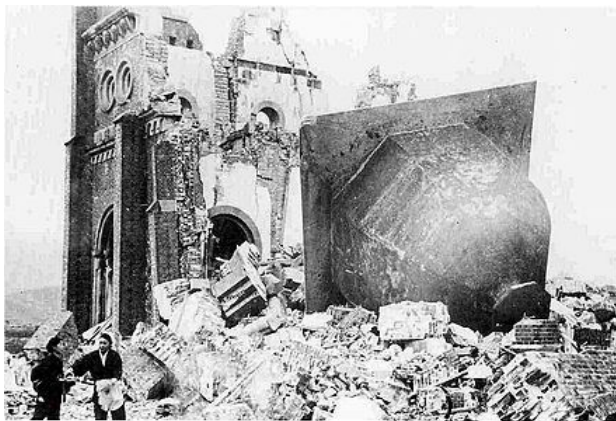
無造作に殺されし人を無造作にかき集めて柵火
にふすかも
Muzōsa ni korosareshi hito o muzōsa ni kaki
atsumete hotabi ni fusukamo
Those killed without ceremony we gather
without ceremony and place in the bonfire
佐々木豊
Sasaki Yutaka
少年の屍と見れば顔よせて吾子ならじかと覗き
ては行く
Shōnen no kabane to mireba kao yosete ako
narajika to nozokite wa yuku
Each 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ともにやらざりし我が終生悔
恨となる
Te o awase mizu horu tomo ni yarazarishi 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兎
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白い街
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

*These poems and their translations were
originally published in The Atomic Bomb:
Voices from Hiroshima and Nagasaki, edited by
Kyoko and Mark Selden, Armonk, pages
117-155. NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989.*

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](#).