

FOUR JAPANESE POEMS FOR PEACE

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The translation of these poems was prompted my friend Hideko Nakamura, Melbourne based activist and founding member of Japanese for Peace. Hideko-san felt some Japanese poetry written in response to World War II would make an impact on Australian audiences at peace events. It was she who chose the poems.

Atrocity literature provokes. It oppresses us with moral problems. Some of these call the genre itself into question. Does atrocity literature subtly legitimize what it commemorates? Does it suggest hope where no hope is possible? Do events with the deadliest impact on populations so transcend subjective experience that individual expression must reduce and betray their meaning? Do infinitely accessible, infinitely repeatable, texts lull and corrupt? Alternatively, what damage might they do to readers or listeners who imaginatively engage with them?

Should the voices of witnesses be allowed to fade?

The three writers represented here addressed themselves to their own world and beyond that to a future – the contingent nature of which they would have been more than usually attuned. Briefly, we are that future. It is time for us to listen.

Only the first two of these four poems fall into the category of atrocity

literature. The latter two call for peace in other ways.

1. 'The Skies of Hiroshima' was written in 1952 by the 23 year old Hayashi Sachiko to document her personal experience of the aftermath of the 6th August, 1945. Sachiko was not a 'writer' under normal circumstances.

The Skies of Hiroshima (Hayashi Sachiko)

That night I slept rough
at last I got to the place where the survivors had gathered
only Dad was there
Mum and Yuuchan were
dead...

The August sunlight
reflected off the Yahata River
and blocked Dad's and my cries
in our throats.

The next day
Dad, with an empty candy box dangling from his hand,
me, with a hoe over my shoulder,
trudged
into the ashes of Hiroshima.
Finally there,
Hiroshima was full of the smell of burnt people.
They smelt like scorched fish.

Dad and I gingerly crossed
what was left of the ferro-concrete bridge.

Even more corpses than the day before!

In the heat of midsummer

their bodies had swollen up

the insides protruded

spirals of intestines

making a faint noise.

Murky yellow liquid ran

from noses, from mouths, from ears

and eyes.

Ah, over there, I could see the warehouse wall,

the ruins of the home I loved.

In the well a charred kitchen knife

was floating.

At the back of the kitchen

the cauldron had fallen

with the remains of the pumpkin

we'd had on the morning of the sixth

burnt on to its sides.

Shards of teacups were scattered about.

When I tried to drive the hoe through the roof tiles

it wouldn't go.

Dad crossed over the tiles

and started to remove them by hand.

Exhausted, his voice faint,

Dad pointed.

I threw away the hoe and dug.

In the heat of the sun we tore up

burnt tiles –

silent –
with all our might.

Ah!
Mum's bones.
Ah! when we grasped them tightly
white powder blew on the wind.
When Mum's bones entered my mouth
they tasted so lonely.
An unbearable sadness enveloped us,
who had been left behind, Dad and I.
Hurrying, crying out loud,
the two of us picked up the bones.
As we put them in the candy box
they made a faint noise.

My little brother was right beside Mum.
He was not only bones
some of his insides hadn't burnt.
They had rolled out of him.
On his insides were stuck some bits of cotton
from his bedding.

'I want to die!'
Dad shouted out.
He held my brother's remains and wept.
From the ruins an iron pipe stuck up
and water poured out of it like out of a fountain.
Bathed in sunlight

it seemed to be the only remaining life.

I
catching some water
in a cracked teacup
offered it before my brother's remains.

Dad
took some rationed hard biscuits.

I
closing my eyes tightly.
Dad
couldn't help hearing
the two voices
as they were buried alive.

After a while
on Dad's uninjured body
spots appeared.

Dad did not want to live
but
feeling sorry for me
who would be left behind
he forced down some food.

"I'd like some grapes.
Cucumber would do."

On the morning of September first

I squeezed a cucumber
added some sugar
and made some juice.

Revived, Dad
looked at me
and smiled
though his voice was full of tears.

Suddenly Dad
looked up into the empty sky
“What a wind!
A storm is coming. A storm,”
he said
and sighing deeply
just there and then
he collapsed
and stopped moving.

In less than a month
I
had become totally alone.

After the flow of tears
my body felt unfocused.

I looked at the river
flowing in front of me

the beautiful, fair weather

blue sky

of Hiroshima

ヒロシマの空

林 幸子

夜 野宿して
 やっと避難さきにたどりついたら
 お父ちゃんだけしか いなかった
 ——お母ちゃんと ユウちゃんが
 死んだよお……

八月の太陽は
 やはたがわ
 前を流れる八幡河に反射して
 父とわたしの泣く声を さえぎった

その あくる日
 父は からの菓子箱をさげ
 くわ
 わたしは 鍬 をかっいで
 ヒロシマの焼け跡へ
 とぼとぼ あるいていった
 やっとたどりついたヒロシマは
 死人を焼く匂いにみちていた
 それはサンマを焼くにおい

燃えさしの鉄橋を
 よたよた渡るお父ちゃんとわたし
 しがい
 昨日よりも沢山の死 骸
 真夏の熱気にさらされ
 体が ぼうちょうして
 はみだす 内臓
 渦巻く腸
 かすかな音をたてながら
 どすぐろい きいろい汁が
 鼻から 口から 耳から
 目から とけて流れる
 ああ あそこに土蔵の石垣がみえる

なつかしい わたしの家の跡
井戸の中に 燃えかけの包丁が
浮いていた

台所のあとに
お釜が ころがり
六日の朝たべた
カボチャの代用食が こげついていた
茶碗のかけらが ちらばっている
瓦の中へ 鍬をうちこむと
はねかえる
お父ちゃんは 瓦のうえに しゃがむと
手 でそれをのけはじめた
ぐったりとした お父ちゃんは
かぼそい声で指さした
わたしは鍬をなげすてて
そこを掘る
陽にさらされて 熱くなった瓦
だまって
一心に掘りかえす父とわたし

ああ
お母ちゃんの骨だ
ああ ぎゅっ とにぎりしめると
白い粉が 風に舞う
お母ちゃんの骨は 口に入れると
さみしい味がする
たえがたいかなしみが
のこされた父とわたしに
おそいかかって
大きな声をあげながら
ふたりは 骨をひらう
菓子箱に入れた骨は
かさかさ と 音をたてる

弟は お母ちゃんのすぐそばで
半分 骨になり
内臓が燃えきらないで
ころり と ころがっていた
その内臓に
フトンの綿が こびりついていた

——死んでしまいたい！

お父ちゃんは叫びながら
 弟の内臓をだいて泣く
 焼跡には鉄管がつきあげ
 噴水のようにふきあげる水が
 あの時のこされた唯一の生命のように
 太陽のひかりを浴びる

わたしは
 ひびの入った湯呑み茶碗に水をくむと
 弟の内臓の前においた
 父は
 配給のカンパンをだした
 わたしは
 じっと 目をつむる
 お父ちゃんは
 生き埋めにされた
 ふたりの声をききながら
 どうしようもなかったのだ

それからしばらくして
 無傷だったお父ちゃんの体に
 斑点がひろがってきた

生きる希望もないお父ちゃん
 それでも
 のこされる わたしがかわいそうだと
 ほしくもないたべ物を 喉にとおす

——ブドウが たべたいなあ
 ——キウリで がまんしてね

それは九月一日の朝
 わたしはキウリをしぼり
 お砂糖を入れて
 ジュウスをつくった

お父ちゃんは
 生きかえたようだとわたしを見て
 わらったけれど
 泣いているような
 よわよわしい声

ふと お父ちゃんは

虚空をみつめ
 一風がひどい
 嵐がくる……嵐が
 といった
 ふーっと大きく息をついた
 そのまま
 がっくりとくずれて
 うごかなくなった

ひと月も たたぬまに
 わたしは
 ひとりぼっちになってしまった

涙を流しきった あとの
 焦点のない わたしの からだ

前を流れる河を
 みつめる

うつくしく 晴れわたった
 ヒロシマの
 あおい空

2. 'Call to Action' was written by Toge Sankichi, who was within three kilometers of ground zero when the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Up until that time he had been a left-leaning minor tanka and haiku poet from a comfortably placed family. Subsequently, he joined the Japan Communist Party. Sankichi's best known poem, 'Give Me Back My Father,' is engraved on a monument dedicated to him in Hiroshima Peace Park. Before he died Sankichi published a collection of poetry documenting the experience of the bombing, the suffering of the victims, and experiences of the peace movement, including brutal attempts by the Occupation to suppress peace rallies in Hiroshima during the Korean War.

Call to Action (Toge Sankichi)

Even now it's not too late.

It's not too late for you to rouse the power within you.

If you shed ceaseless tears

from the wound to your heart
received when the incandescent flash of that day hit your retina;
if even now from that split
the bloody pus that curses war steadily pours,
giving you the body odour of Hiroshima;
if, as the flames pressed closer,
you have thrust both hands from under the house
and still could not save the little sister who lay writhing in pain;
if, without even scorched shreds of clothes to cover your genitals,
your raw arms hanging over your breasts,
you have staggered on legs naked and swollen with burns,
across a blinding desert of rubble
on a journey for which nothing can comfort you
still the real you can

stretch out those grotesque arms
to the many similar arms
and, if it seems like that flash might fall again,
hold up the accursed sun
even now it's not too late

you can block with your back, branded with death,
the tear ducts of the compassionate
who are sick of war, but stand immobilised;
you can grasp resolutely
those timid dangling hands
in your raw palms.

Yes
even now it is not too late.

呼びかけ

峠三吉

いまでもおそくはない
 あなたのほんとうの力をふるい起すのはおそく
 はない
 あの日、網膜を灼く閃光につらぬかれた心の痛
 手から
 したたりやまぬ涙をあなたがもつなら
 いまもその裂目から、どくどくと戦争を呪う血
 膿をしたたらせる
 ひろしまの体臭をあなたがもつなら
 焔の迫ったおも屋の下から
 両手を出してもがく妹を捨て
 焦げた衣服のきれはしで恥部をおおうこともな
 く
 赤むけの両腕をむねにたらし
 火をふくんだ裸足でよろよろと
 照り返す瓦礫の沙漠を
 なぐさめられることのない旅にさまよい出た
 ほんとうのあなたが

その異形の腕をたかくさしのべ
 おなじ多くの腕とともに
 また墜ちかかろうとする
 呪いの太陽を支えるのは
 いまからでもおそくはない

戦争を厭いながらたたずむ
 すべての優しい人々の涙腺を
 死の烙印をせおうあなたの背中で塞ぎ
 おずおずとたれたその手を
 あなたの赤むけの両掌で

しっかりと握りあわせるのは
 さあ
 いまでもおそくはない

3. Trained as a pharmacist, Ibraragi Noriko witnessed the fire bombing of Tokyo. After the war, she made a name for herself as a poet, award-winning playwright and writer of children's stories. Two of her poems are presented here, and the second, 'June,' gives some insight into the dreams and hopes for the future still held by Japanese on the left in the post-war era.

When I was at my Prettiest (Ibraragi Noriko)

When I was at my prettiest
 the houses were noisily collapsing,
 and from a dreadful place
 I saw the blue sky and stuff.

When I was at my prettiest
 lots of people died around me
 in factories, out at sea, on nameless islands
 and I lost out on my chance to be fashionable.

When I was at my prettiest
 no one kindly brought me presents.
 The boys knew only how to salute.
 Leaving nothing but their lovely glances behind they all rushed
 off.

When I was at my prettiest
 my head was empty.
 My heart was hard.
 Only my arms and legs shone like chestnuts.

When I was at my prettiest
 my country lost the war.
 Can you believe such a stupid thing happened?
 With the sleeves of my blouse rolled up I plodded round the
 mean little town.

When I was at my prettiest
 jazz overflowed the radio,
 and dizzy as when I broke the no smoking rule
 I drank in the sweet music of another country.

When I was at my prettiest
 I was very unhappy.
 I was totally inconsistent.
 I was awfully lonely.

So I decided to try and live a long life,
 like that French artist Rousseau,
 who, in his old age, painted pictures that were truly beautiful.

わたしが一番きれいだったとき 茨木のり子

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 街々はがらがら崩れていって
 とんでもないところから
 青空なんかが見えたりした

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 まわりの人達が沢山死んだ
 工場で 海で 名もない島で
 わたしはおしゃれのきっかけを落してしまった

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 だれもやさしい贈物を捧げてはくれなかった
 男たちは拳手の礼しか知らなくて
 きれいな眼差だけを残し皆発っていった

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 わたしの頭はからっぽで
 わたしの心はかたくなで
 手足ばかりが栗色に光った

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 わたしの国は戦争で負けた
 そんな馬鹿なことってあるものか
 ブラウスの腕をまくり卑屈な町をのし歩いた

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 ラジオからはジャズが溢れた
 禁煙を破ったときのようにくらくらしながら
 わたしは異国の甘い音楽をむさぼった

わたしが一番きれいだったとき
 わたしはとてもふしあわせ
 わたしはとてもとんちんかん
 わたしはめっぼうさびしかった

だから決めた できれば長生きすることに
 年取ってから凄く美しい絵を描いた
 フランスのルオー爺さんのようにね

4. June (Ibaragi Noriko)

Isn't there somewhere a beautiful village
 where, when day's work is over, there's a measure of rye wine,
 where the hoes are left standing, the bamboo baskets left lying,
 as both men and women down a generous cup?

Isn't there somewhere a beautiful town,
 where edible fruit hangs down from the street trees
 right into the distance; and the violet of twilight
 is full of the friendly uproar of youngsters?

Isn't there somewhere the beautiful strength
 of people living together in the same era,
 a warmth and an irony and even an anger,
 that can be a creative force in the world?

6月

茨木のり子

どこかに美しい村はないか
 1日の仕事の終わりには一杯の黒麦酒
 鍬を立てかけ 籠を置き
 男も女も大きなジョッキをかたむける

どこかに美しい街はないか
 食べられる実をつけた街路樹が
 どこまでも続き すみれいろした夕暮れは
 若者のやさしいさざめきで満ち満ちる

どこかに美しい人と人との力はないか
 同じ時代をともに生きる
 したしさとおかしさとそうして怒りが
 鋭い力となって たちあられる

Post Script

Those interested in a sophisticated discussion of the dilemmas of Japanese atrocity literature and/or a survey of the key works that came out of Hiroshima and Nagasaki should read J. W. Treat (1995) *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb* (Chicago & London, The University of Chicago Press). More (and different translations) of Ibaragi Noriko's poems can be found in Ibaragi Noriko (1992) *When I was at my most beautiful: and other poems 1953-1982*, translated by Peter Robinson and Fumiko Horikawa (Cambridge, Skate).

It may be of interest that the director Kuroki Kazuo recently made a film *Chichi to Kuraseba* (2004) exploring the question of survivor guilt, the desire to forget and the importance of documenting the experience of the bombing of Hiroshima. This film, like the books mentioned above, is available from the Matheson Library.

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