

From Trinity to Trinity:  
Hayashi Kyōko Writes in Sustained Mourning

By

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## Abstract

### From Trinity to Trinity: Life and Art of Hayashi Kyōko Eiko Otake

My “Artistic Thesis” is a translation of the Japanese short novel “Torinichi kara Torinichi e [From Trinity to Trinity]” by Hayashi Kyōko (b.1930). Hayashi is a celebrated female writer whose semi-autobiographical work chronicles her experience as a Nagasaki A-bomb survivor. “Torinichi” concisely but emotionally describes the protagonist/narrator’s visit to the Trinity site in New Mexico, the first atomic bomb test site, 54 years after she was exposed to a nuclear attack in Nagasaki.

My “Background Essay” investigates the significance and challenges of Japanese atomic bomb literature as it illustrates the human experiences of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Japanese atomic bomb literature inevitably presents difficulties in delivering factual accuracy in the same way other testimonial writings do. However, artists of Japanese atomic bomb literature, particularly Hayashi Kyōko, present human resilience and the transformative power of art in the very area where effectiveness of language and witnessing is put into question. The process of creating such art has enabled Hayashi, and perhaps other victims and artists, to transcend a randomly given but violently enforced atomic bomb victim-hood into an individually tailored survivor-chronicler-hood. Yet I argue that Hayashi’s foreignness and insistence make her singular in the genre. Following a short description of the historicity of the atomic bombings and atomic bomb victims I will give an overview of the genre of Japanese atomic bomb literature and its writers. This examination of atomic bomb literature will lead to a discussion of the silence which epitomizes the shock, incommunicability, and massive deaths brought by the atomic bombings. By looking at three works, each of which represents a different phase of her career, I will examine Hayashi’s artistry, thoughts, and process of transformation. This paper concludes by showing that Hayashi’s “Torinichi” is not only the fruition of her long journey as an atomic bomb victim/artist but also a work of human mourning that reaches beyond the existing genre of Japanese atomic bomb literature.

My “Artistic Aims Essay” will explain how my artistic sympathy for Hayashi Kyōko and the decisions I made as her translator are supported by the reciprocal relationship between translator/scholar Eiko Otake and dancer/choreographer Eiko. I present “sustained mourning” as a common motivation both for the writer Hayashi and for myself. I also observe how *past*, *present* and *future* are not only related, but intricately and radically united. This notion of time as a united whole is critical not only in my understanding of atomic bomb literature but also in my translation of “Torinichi.”

People do not experience facts; they experience emotions, pains and physical sensations. Mourning continues. My thesis as a whole honors Hayashi’s commitment to create artistic representations of the human experiences of the atomic bombings.

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## Preface

As a native of Japan, I always felt I knew enough about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>1</sup> As a New Yorker on 9/11, however, I became aware that since I was born in 1952, I did not truly understand how catastrophic the atomic bombings were and how terribly the victims suffered. It was a shock for me to realize that beyond annual television and newspaper specials, I had never acquired any real knowledge of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. At the same time, I became acutely aware that victims of the atomic bombings are living on the same earth as I am. This realization has changed my perception of the past and the present world. 1945 was 62 years ago. Nevertheless, that past, through the bodies and trauma of *hibakusha* (the Japanese word meaning the people who survived the atomic bombings) is part of our present. In fact Hiroshima Mayor Akiba Tadatoshi points out that we owe our existence to *hibakusha*. Despite difficulties, a sizable number of *hibakusha* transformed themselves from passive victims to active peace activists by attending marches and conferences, and offering witness accounts. He praises *hibakusha*'s efforts as one of the main reasons that no more atomic bombings of civilian cities have occurred since 1945.<sup>2</sup> I wanted to learn more about the human

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<sup>1</sup> Growing up in post-war Japan, I understand and agree with American psychologist Robert Jay Lifton's observation; "The atomic bombings were experienced, even by Japanese born after they took place." After conducting extensive interviews in Kyoto and Hiroshima, Lifton noticed contradictory tendencies in young people of the 60's, of which I am a part. The youths do not talk about Hiroshima or Nagasaki unless they are from those areas, but the fact that Japan alone had been exposed to atomic bombs had an enormous significance in forming their identity (Robert Jay Lifton, Death in Life, 4-5).

<sup>2</sup> Akiba Tadatoshi, "Hiroshima Message: Reconciliation Instead of Retaliation." Akiba, the chairman of Mayors for Peace, delivered this address to the inaugural conference of the Asia office of UNITAR (the United Nations Institute for Training and Research) in Hiroshima on November 17, 2003. Znet.

experiences of the atomic bombings while there are still survivors alive to tell their stories.

As an artist, I was particularly interested in finding out what kind of arts and thoughts emerged from the human experience of the bombings. This is why I decided to study atomic bomb literature.<sup>3</sup> By reading literary works written by *hibakusha*, I wanted to investigate how *hibakusha* (re)constructed their atomic bomb experiences and mourned the dead. I wanted to know how and why survivors wrote about their experiences that were essentially beyond words. How does art respond to violence and how does the practice of art help people -- artists, viewers and readers -- survive and relate to others? In asking these questions my stance has been proactive; I looked for evidence of human resilience and the power of art-making in atomic bomb literature. I find that *hibakusha* writer Hayashi Kyōko, who could easily have been killed in Nagasaki, embodies such resilience. Among her numerous works, I find "Torinichi kara torinichi e" [From Trinity to Trinity] to be the most transformative. I translated this piece as my artistic thesis.<sup>4</sup>

At 76 (as of 2007) Hayashi is still an active writer. Even in short essays about seemingly unrelated matters -- such as cooking or homemaking -- Hayashi almost never fails to mention that she was exposed to the atomic bombing, as if she cannot utter a word

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<sup>3</sup> For the definition of atomic bomb literature, see page 9.

<sup>4</sup> "Torinichi kara torinichi e," was first published in August 2000 in the magazine, Gunzō (September 2000) It was subsequently published in a book entitled, Nagai jikan o kaketa ningen no keiken [Human experience that took a very long time] in September 2000 along with a longer piece bearing the same title as the book. When I quote from this work, I use my translation but the page numbers are from the Japanese first edition of Nagai jikan o kaketa ningen no keiken, hereafter Nagai jikan.

unless first clarifying that she is *hibakusha*. Hayashi not only writes about her experience of the atomic bombing but also about the experiences of others: her friends and teachers, many of whom died on August 9, the day the bomb was dropped on Nagasaki or those who later died from the bomb's radiation. What has sustained Hayashi's mourning?<sup>5</sup> How has her mourning related to her continuity, creativity and longevity as an artist? In facing the difficulty of representing the atomic bombings, how has Hayashi developed her unique writing style and artistic approach? As a result of my reading of atomic bomb literature and Hayashi's works, I consider Hayashi Kyōko as one model of an artist who, through art-making, has transformed her victimhood, her obliged group identity, into a personal, active *hibakusha*-hood. She has chosen to see, hear, and learn more about the atomic bombings so that as a writer/chronicler, she can construct multi-faceted human experiences of the nuclear explosion.

My background essay is organized into three sections: First, I will give a brief description of the atomic bombings and atomic bomb victims. I consider such information to be necessary knowledge in the discussion of atomic bomb literature. Second, I will provide an overview of the genre of Japanese atomic bomb literature to which Hayashi's works belong. Here I will discuss the difficulties of representing historical atrocity, which Hayashi inherits. Finally, I will introduce *hibakusha* writer Hayashi Kyōko and examine three of her works: Hayashi's first major work "Matsuri no ba" [The Site of Rituals], her first book-length work Nakiga gotoku [As if not], and

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<sup>5</sup> In my artist essay, I will define "sustained mourning," which I consider to be a common motif in both Hayashi's and my own artistic work. Please see page 80.

“Torinichi kara torinichi e.”<sup>6</sup> I hope to illustrate the essential characteristics and motifs that have sustained her mourning, her marginal viewpoint, and the long artistic career that eventually brought her to the Trinity Site in New Mexico, “the starting point” of her “August 9” and “the final destination of *hibakusha*.”<sup>7</sup>

Let me note here that although I am dealing in parts of this thesis with historical or factual events surrounding the atomic bombings, my focus is on atomic bomb literature, which I also use as my source texts. Quoting from literary works is not quoting facts. As Dominick LaCapra has argued, while victim testimonials are not always the most reliable sources for recounting what “actually happened,” they are valuable for something other than factual accuracy, which is precisely the human factor. As a witness relives the past, “as if it were happening now in the present,” her testimony may involve “distortion, disguise, and other permutations relating to process of imaginative transformation and narrative as well as perhaps repression, denial, dissociation and foreclosure,” but these issues do not “invalidate” her account in “its entirety.”<sup>8</sup> Since I am concerned with the human experiences, perceptions, and thoughts surrounding the atomic bombings, I value survivor testimonials and artistic representations in addition to other sources held to be more objective.

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<sup>6</sup> “Matsuri no ba” was first published in 1975 in magazine *Gunzō* and was included in the book of the same title. “Matsuri no ba” was translated under the title of “Ritual of Death” by Kyōko Selden and published as a part of *Nuke-Rebuke*. When I quote the work in this paper pagination refers to the Japanese original except when otherwise noted. *Nakigagotoku* was first published in Japan in 1981, when it was also nominated for the prestigious Tanizaki Prize. *Nakigagotoku* has not been translated.

<sup>7</sup> Hayashi, “Torinichi,” *Nagai jikan*, 135-136.

<sup>8</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, 88-89.

All translations from Japanese language source materials are mine unless noted otherwise. I am using modified MLA for this paper.

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