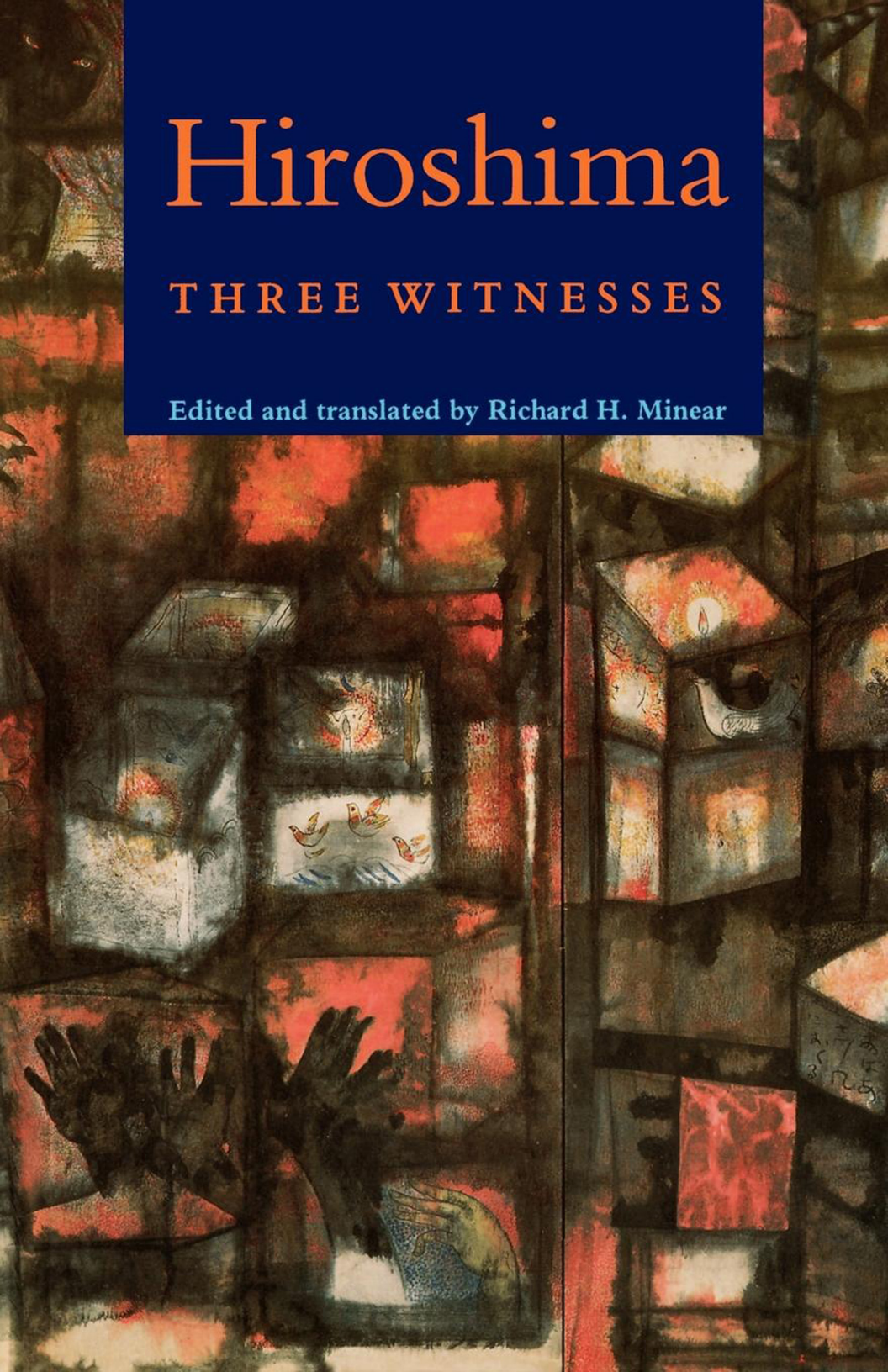


Hiroshima

THREE WITNESSES

Edited and translated by Richard H. Minear



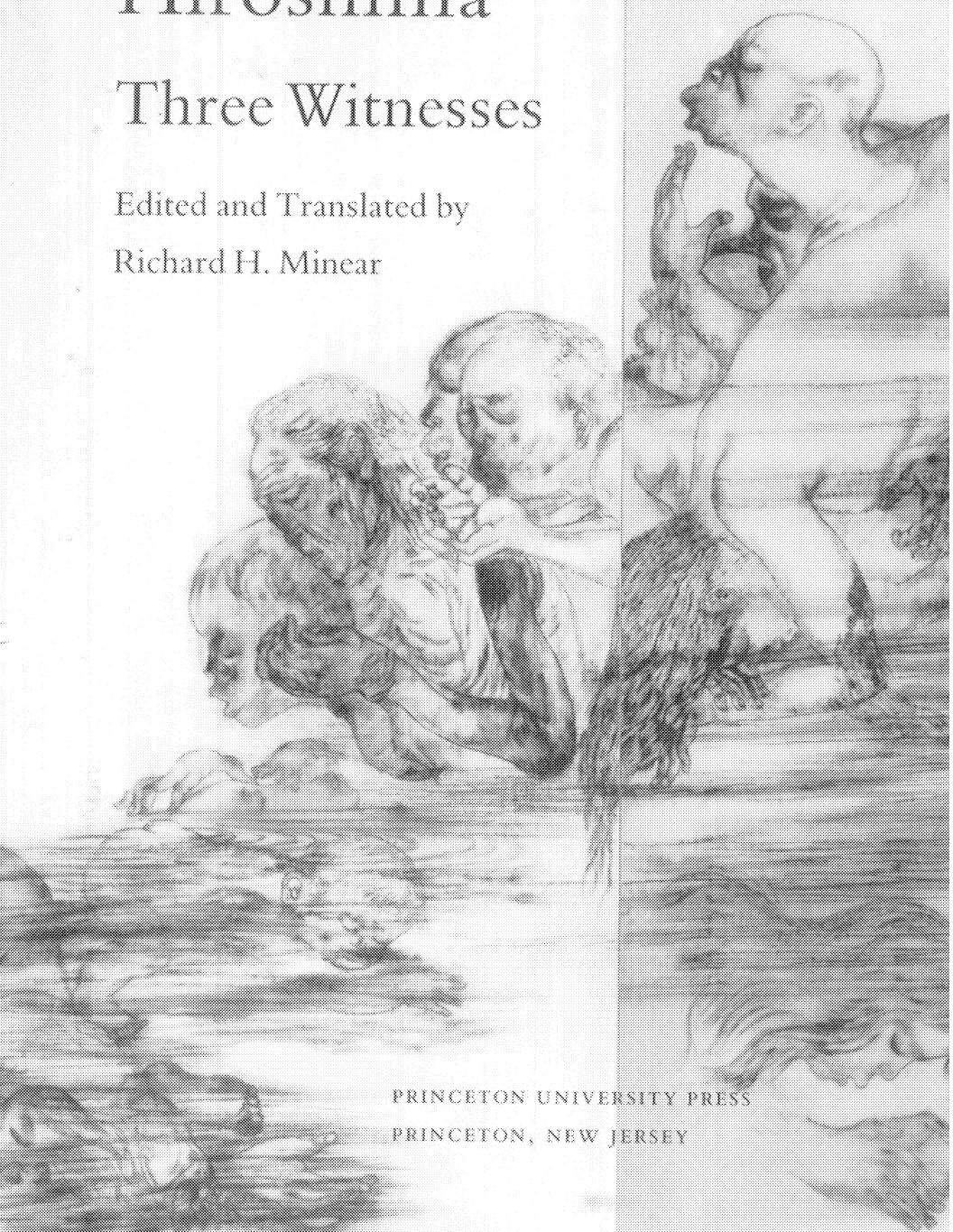
Hiroshima
Three Witnesses



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Richard H. Minear



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Cover illustration: A section of “Floating Lanterns” (1969) by
Maruki Iri and Maruki Tōshi. Maruki Tōshi’s text for this
illustration reads: “On August 6, the seven rivers of Hiroshima
are filled with floating lanterns. Inscribed with the names of
mothers, fathers, younger sisters, they float down to the sea.
Before they reach the sea, the tide shifts, and the rising tide
sweeps the lanterns back up. Their candles out, they drift on
dark currents. This is the same Ōta River that 38 years earlier
was filled with corpses.” Parts of five other murals by the
Marukis appear in this volume, courtesy of Maruki Gallery for
the Hiroshima Panels. For discussion of the Marukis, their art,
and the murals represented here, see pp. 371–378.

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that help, this project would have taken much longer and been much more difficult.

For translation rights I am indebted to Hara Tokihiko (*Summer Flowers*), Nakagawa Ichie (*City of Corpses*), and Tōge Takashi (*Poems of the Atomic Bomb*). For permission to reproduce their art I thank Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi.

Needless to say, the institutions and individuals listed above bear no final responsibility for this book. That responsibility is mine alone.

NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES AND TERMS Throughout this volume Japanese names are given in Japanese order: surname first, then given name. In the case of Hara Tamiki, Hara is the writer's family name; Tamiki, his given name. In the case of Ōta Yōko, Ōta is the writer's family name; Yōko, her given name.

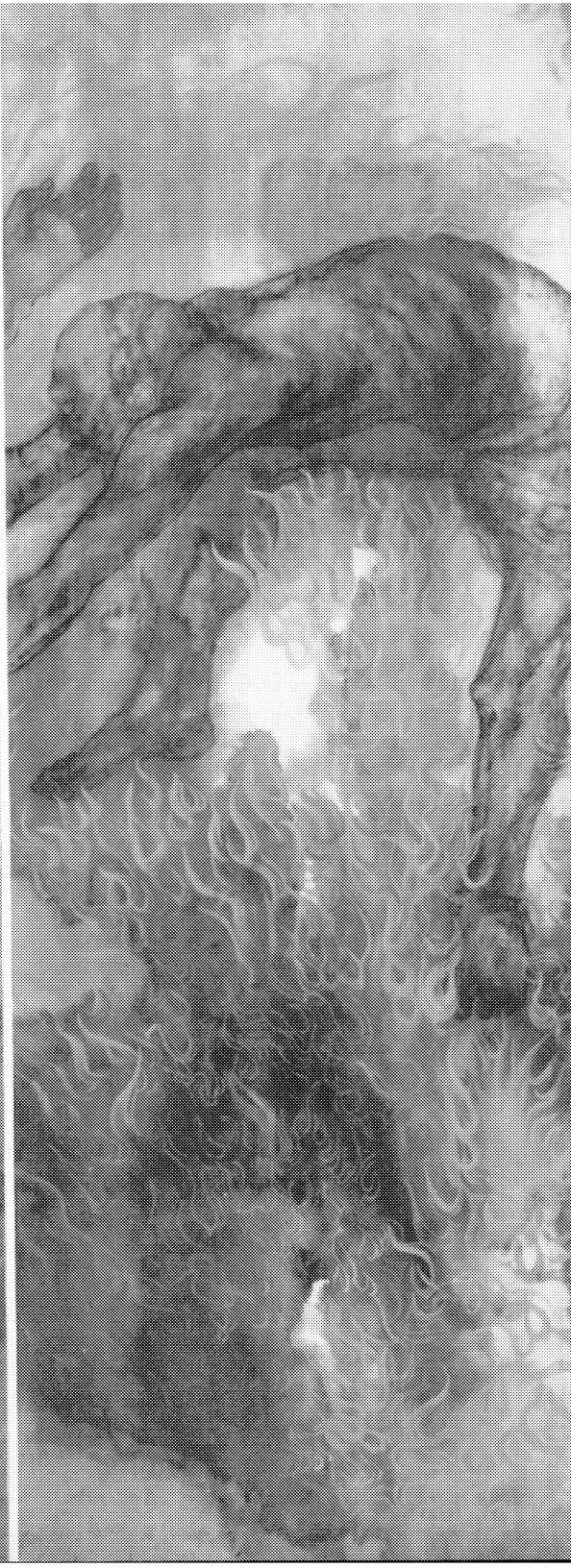
Japanese words are not difficult to pronounce. There is little accent; vowel sounds are close to those of Spanish or Italian; long marks prolong the same sound. Hiroshima is He-row-she-ma (there is a slight accent on the second syllable). Hara Tamiki is Hah-rah Tah-me-key. Ōta Yōko is Ohh-tah Yeo-ko. Tōge Sankichi is Tohh-geh Sahn-key-chee.

This book includes a Glossary of Japanese terms and a Guide to Names and Places.

Hiroshima

Three Witnesses





Introduction

Part of the horror of thinking about a holocaust lies in the fact that it leads us to supplant the human world with a statistical world; we seek a human truth and come up with a handful of figures. The only source that gives us a glimpse of the human truth is the testimony of the survivors of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings.

—Jonathan Schell, *The Fate of the Earth*

AT 8:15:17 on the morning of August 6, 1945, the United States exploded an atomic bomb over the Japanese city of Hiroshima. According to an official Japanese reckoning of 1946 that did not include military personnel, the bomb left 118,661 dead, 30,524 severely injured, 48,606 slightly injured, 3,677 missing, and 118,613 uninjured. Scientific research since 1945 has determined with great exactitude the height at which the bomb exploded (580 meters plus or minus 15 meters), the temperature of the outer edge of the fireball (1,800 degrees centigrade 15 milliseconds after the explosion), the velocity of the shock (100 meters per second 1,000 meters from the epicenter).¹

Can we find the truth of Hiroshima in statistics? What do these numbers tell us? What *can* they tell us when American and Soviet nuclear arsenals today hold weapons a thousand times more powerful than the bomb the United States dropped on Hiroshima? Jonathan Schell is surely right: we must look to the survivors for the human truth of Hiroshima. Yet how many voices of Hiroshima have we heard?

Three writers of note were in Hiroshima on August 6 and survived to write of their experiences. The witnesses are the fabulist Hara Tamiki, the novelist Ōta Yōko, and the poet Tōge Sankichi. They were three very different individuals, different in their politics, their

¹ The Committee for the Compilation of Materials on Damage Caused by the Atomic Bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, ed., *Hiroshima and Nagasaki: The Physical, Medical, and Social Effects of the Atomic Bombings*, trans. Eisei Ishikawa and David L. Swain (New York: Basic Books, 1981).

writing, their styles of life and death. (We will encounter all three in more depth in the separate introductions to their works.)

Still, they shared the staggering burden of bearing witness to August 6. Within 48 hours of August 6, before leaving with his relatives for shelter outside the city, Hara Tamiki jotted down this note: “Miraculously unhurt; must be Heaven’s will that I survive and report what happened. If so, have my work cut out.” Ōta Yōko later recorded this exchange with her half sister as they walked through a street littered with corpses:

“You’re really looking at them—how can you? I can’t stand and look at corpses.” Sister seemed to be criticizing me. I replied: “I’m looking with two sets of eyes—the eyes of a human being and the eyes of a writer.”

“Can you write—about something like this?”

“Some day I’ll have to. That’s the responsibility of a writer who’s seen it.”

In one of his poems, Tōge Sankichi addresses a child whose father was killed in the South Pacific and whose mother died on August 6; there is no one to answer the child’s innocent questions. The first three stanzas of the poem end with questions: “Who will tell you of that day? . . . Who will tell you/of that night? . . . Who will tell you?/Who?” In the final stanza Tōge answers his own question:

Right!

I’ll search you out,

put my lips to your tender ear, and tell you . . .

I’ll tell you the real story—

I swear I will.

This volume presents the first complete translation into English of Hara Tamiki’s *Summer Flowers*, the first translation into English of Ōta Yōko’s *City of Corpses*, and a new translation of Tōge Sankichi’s *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*. Forty-five years have passed since August 6, 1945, and the English-language world is able only now to read the premier first-person accounts of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Have we tried to avoid messages we preferred not to hear?

IN JAPAN there is a category of writing called “atomic bomb literature” (*gembaku bungaku*). The category is a broad one. It includes jour-

nalism, memoirs, novels, poems, plays; it includes authors who were victims and authors who were not; it includes famous writers and anonymous ones. In 1983 a press in Tokyo published the most comprehensive compendium to date, *Nihon no gembaku bungaku* (The atomic bomb literature of Japan), in fifteen volumes. There are individual volumes for six writers, including Hara Tamiki (volume 1, with *Summer Flowers* as the lead entry) and Ōta Yōko (volume 2, with *City of Corpses* as the lead entry). Six poems by Tōge Sankichi appear in volume 13, which is devoted to poetry.² Much of the material dates from the 1960s and later—the writings, for example, of Hayashi Kyōko (b. 1930), Oda Makoto (b. 1932), and Ōe Kenzaburō (b. 1935). Hara, Ōta, and Tōge were the pioneers, the first generation; long before 1960 Hara and Tōge were dead, and Ōta, exhausted, had turned away from the subject of Hiroshima.³

In *The Plague*, Albert Camus has Tarrou speak the following lines: “At the beginning of a pestilence and when it ends, there’s always a propensity for rhetoric. In the first case, habits have not yet been lost; in the second, they’re returning. It is in the thick of a calamity that one gets hardened to the truth—in other words, to silence.”⁴ With *Summer Flowers* and *City of Corpses*, we are still “in the thick of the calamity,” and “the propensity for rhetoric” has not had much time to reassert itself. Neither *Summer Flowers* nor *City of Corpses* is fiction. Each is the writer’s account of personal experience. Art is evident in the writer’s focus, choice of events, style, vocabulary. But the events themselves are real; they happened.

² *Nihon no gembaku bungaku*, 15 vols. (Tokyo: Horupu, 1983). Five of Tōge’s poems appear in the text; the sixth, “Prelude,” appears in the frontispiece, a photograph of the stone monument to Tōge in Peace Park, Hiroshima. Given Tōge’s status, it does seem strange that the compendium does not include all the poems of *Poems of the Atomic Bomb*. For existing translations into English of nonfictional and fictional accounts of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, see Suggestions for Further Reading.

³ The writer Nakano Kōji divides writers of atomic bomb literature into two generations: those who were mature in 1945, and those who were children then. In addition to Hara, Ōta, and Tōge, his first generation includes Kurihara Sadako and a few others. “Taidan: gembaku bungaku o megutte” (Dialogue [with Nagaoka Hiroyoshi]: on literature of the atomic bomb), *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō*, August 1985, p. 11. This dialogue opens an issue devoted to literature of the atomic bomb.

⁴ Albert Camus, *The Plague*, trans. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Modern Library, 1948), p. 107.

Hara, Ōta, and Tōge are all figures of note in twentieth-century Japanese literature but seldom get the attention they deserve. The Kodansha *Encyclopedia of Japan* (9 volumes, 1983) has a brief (and inaccurate) entry on Hara but ignores Ōta and Tōge. Donald Keene's magisterial *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (2 volumes, 1984) makes no mention of any of the three. Edward Seidensticker, second only to Keene in introducing Japanese literature to the English-language world, recently dismissed Hara and Ōta in shocking fashion: "Until Ibuse Masuji came along with much the best book that has been written about Hiroshima, the chief propagandists were Hara Tamiki and Ōta Yōko."⁵ Perhaps this volume will provide an opportunity for others to come to their own judgments.

The experience of Hiroshima reminds us of the experience of other holocausts, in particular, the European Holocaust. There, too, survivors—Charlotte Delbo, Primo Levi, Nelly Sachs, Elie Wiesel—bear witness. There, too, the burden of testifying proves crushing. What words can describe the horror without taming it, domesticating it, demeaning it, trivializing it? What testimony can bring peace to the soul of the witness? Of course, there were significant differences between the two holocausts—differences in duration, in motivation, in distance between perpetrator and victim. Still, we cannot overlook the striking similarities.

In his fine book on the literature of the European Holocaust, Lawrence Langer wrote: ". . . every survivor memoir must be read, at least partially, as a work of the imagination, which selects some details and blocks out others for the purpose of shaping the reader's response—indeed, for the purpose of organizing the author's own response, too. . . . all telling modifies what is being told."⁶ Langer's words should guide us in our study of Hiroshima. Hara's experience is not *the* Hiroshima experience; it is *his* Hiroshima. Ōta's Hiroshima is not Hara's Hiroshima but *her* Hiroshima. Tōge's Hiroshima is a

⁵ Edward Seidensticker, review of Jay Rubin's *Injurious to Public Morals*, in *Journal of Japanese Studies* 11.1:221 (Winter 1985).

⁶ Lawrence Langer, *Versions of Survival* (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), p. xii. See also the same author's *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) and *The Age of Atrocity* (Boston: Beacon, 1978).

third Hiroshima. To be sure, the experience of atomic holocaust was more uniform than the experience of the European Holocaust, but in both cases the personality and world view of the witness affected the individual's reaction. Who the witness was played a significant role in how that person reacted.

Hara, Ōta, and Tōge survived August 6. More than one hundred thousand in Hiroshima did not. Who tells us *their* story? Who speaks for them? John Hersey's *Hiroshima* (1946) was the first significant account in English of the devastation of Hiroshima; it remains an enormously influential book, the account that introduces Hiroshima to most Western readers.⁷ Reading *Hiroshima* can be an intensely moving experience, but the book may mislead us even as it enlightens. In her slashing attack on *Hiroshima*, Mary McCarthy wrote: "To have done the atomic bomb justice, Mr. Hersey would have had to interview the dead." Rhetoric aside, her point is a serious one: the atomic holocaust of Hiroshima is qualitatively different from other disasters. Formulas appropriate to accounts of flood or earthquake are simply not adequate. McCarthy wrote: "Hell is not [Hersey's] sphere. Yet it is precisely in this sphere—that is, in the moral world—that the atomic bomb exploded. To treat it journalistically . . . is, in a sense, to deny its existence. . . . Up to August 31 of this year [1946], no one dared think of Hiroshima—it appeared to us all as a kind of hole in human history. Mr. Hersey has filled that hole . . . he has made it familiar and safe, and so, in the final sense, boring."⁸ We need not agree with

⁷ John Hersey, *Hiroshima* (New York: Knopf, 1946; new edition with additional chapter, New York: Knopf, 1985).

⁸ Mary McCarthy, Letter to the Editor, *Politics* 3.10:367 (November 1946). See also Dwight MacDonald, "Hersey's 'Hiroshima,'" *Politics* 3.10:308 (October 1946) and Robert Warshow, "E. B. White and the *New Yorker*" (1947), in Robert Warshow, *The Immediate Experience: Movies, Comics, Theatre and Other Aspects of Popular Culture* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1964), pp. 63–66. John Leonard dismisses both McCarthy and MacDonald ("Looking Back at Hiroshima Makes Uneasy Viewing," *New York Times*, August 1, 1976, p. D.23): "This, of course, isn't really coping; it is striking an attitude. It is, moreover, greedy and elitist, a kind of critical imperialism: my categories are better than your categories, and what do ordinary people know anyway, unworthy as they are of their tragedies?" See also Michael J. Yavenditti, "John Hersey and the American Conscience: The Reception of 'Hiroshima,'" *Pacific Historical Review* 43.1:24–49 (February 1975) and the same author's "American Reactions to the Use of the Atomic Bombs on Japan, 1945–1947" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1970), and Paul Boyer, *By the Bomb's Early Light:*

McCarthy in full to be grateful for her warning of the dangers of speaking the unspeakable, describing the indescribable, taming the untameable. A recent survey of our nuclear images catalogs the stunning impact of the bomb on all aspects of our thinking.⁹ Our willingness to listen now to these witnesses may mean that we acknowledge the justice of McCarthy's assertion that the atomic bomb exploded in *our* moral world. To paraphrase Ōta Yōko's comment about the responsibility of the writer: can we read—about Hiroshima? Can we not read?

WHATEVER our end point, we start with a place, the city of Hiroshima. Hara, Ōta, Tōge: all three had spent long years in Hiroshima; all three had a great love for the city. It will help us in reading their accounts to have a general sense of the geography of the city. We can gain such a sense in part by studying the maps that form part of this volume, in part by listening to the witnesses themselves. For now, we need to know that the setting is one of great natural beauty: a delta surrounded by mountains and divided by the seven arms of the Ōta River, with the Inland Sea and its islands to the south. Here is Ōta Yōko's description:

Hiroshima fanned out between the mountain ranges to the north and the Inland Sea to the south; seven rivers flowed gently through the city in the delta. Countless bridges spanned the great branches of the river . . . They were all modern, clean, broad, white, long. From Ujina Bay, the fishing boats with their white sails and the small passenger boats came fairly far up all the branches. Upstream, the river offered vivid reflections of the mountains.

The rivers of Hiroshima were beautiful. Theirs was a serene and unchanging beauty. They stretched out uniformly blue in this broad expanse with no variation in elevation. One couldn't see distinct currents; one couldn't hear the pleasant sound of rapids; nor could one watch gentle brooks. The rivers were serene and unchanging even on freezing winter days, when snow fell.

I liked Hiroshima's rivers best on days when heavy snow fell. The snow

American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Atomic Age (New York: Pantheon, 1985), pp. 203–210.

⁹ Spencer R. Weart, *Nuclear Fear: A History of Images* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

sealed off the various parts of town from each other and turned the city into a silent and uniformly silver world. Yet the seven rivers still flowed, unhurried. . . .

Tributes to Hiroshima's beauty also appear frequently in the writings of Hara and Tōge.

Rivers were the key to Hiroshima's beauty in 1945; they are still Hiroshima's pride today. On August 6 they played a different role: they offered what little relief was available to the victims of the atomic bomb—water, escape from the flames that engulfed everything flammable. Most branches of the Ōta flowed in riverbeds between man-made embankments five or more feet high, the water level rising and falling with the season and the tide; even at high water, there were often dry stretches of riverbed. The riverbanks were the areas atop the embankments, between river and city. Together, riverbeds and riverbanks became the setting where the drama of life and, more often, death played itself out. Hara Tamiki and Ōta Yōko fled to the same river—indeed, to the same area of the river; farther away from Ground Zero, Tōge did not need to flee to a river, yet rivers figure prominently in his poems.

Atomic holocaust may render all geography ultimately irrelevant; but it was Hiroshima the bomb obliterated on August 6, not a nameless, featureless spot on the map.

WE MUST LEARN a new geography; we must learn a new chronology, too. Hara, Ōta, and Tōge told time differently from most of us. Ask most of us to think of events during these early postwar years, and we will come up with a fairly standard list: Churchill's Iron Curtain speech (March 15, 1946), the Marshall Plan (June 5, 1947), the Berlin Blockade (June 24, 1948), the establishment of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO, April 4, 1949), the victory of the Chinese Communists (December 8, 1949), the Korean War (June 25, 1950), the election of President Eisenhower (November 4, 1952) and his reelection (November 6, 1956). A few of us will remember as well the Hiss case (1948), the McCarran Act (1950), the trial of the Rosenbergs (1951), and the McCarthy hearings (1953–1954).

These are not the dates that loom large in the universe of the writer-victims of the atomic bomb. Their calendar is closer to the famous clock of the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. Sundials record only the sunny hours; the writer-victims reacted particularly to events atomic. Their calendar of these years focused on these dates:

1946	July	American atomic tests at Bikini
1948	April–May	American atomic tests at Eniwetok
1949	September	Soviet explosion of atomic bomb
1950	March	Stockholm Peace Petition
	November	President Truman’s statement that the use of atomic weapons in Korea was under consideration
1952	November	American announcement of development of hydrogen bomb
1953	September	Soviet announcement of development of hydrogen bomb
1954	March	American test of hydrogen bomb at Bikini, leading to the radiation death of a fisherman from a Japanese boat (the <i>Lucky Dragon</i>) that strayed into the test zone
	September	Soviet test of hydrogen bomb

These are the dates that figure prominently in the consciousness of survivors of Hiroshima. And surely this calendar is less parochial, more significant in world history, than the calendar most of us carry around in our heads. It underscores as well how successful most of us have been in holding things atomic at arm’s length: one calendar for real history, a second calendar when—and if—we focus on the atomic side of today’s world.¹⁰

The first decade after August 6 saw very little political agitation in Japan against the bomb. Hiroshima’s first international conference against atomic and hydrogen bombs was convened in 1955, on the

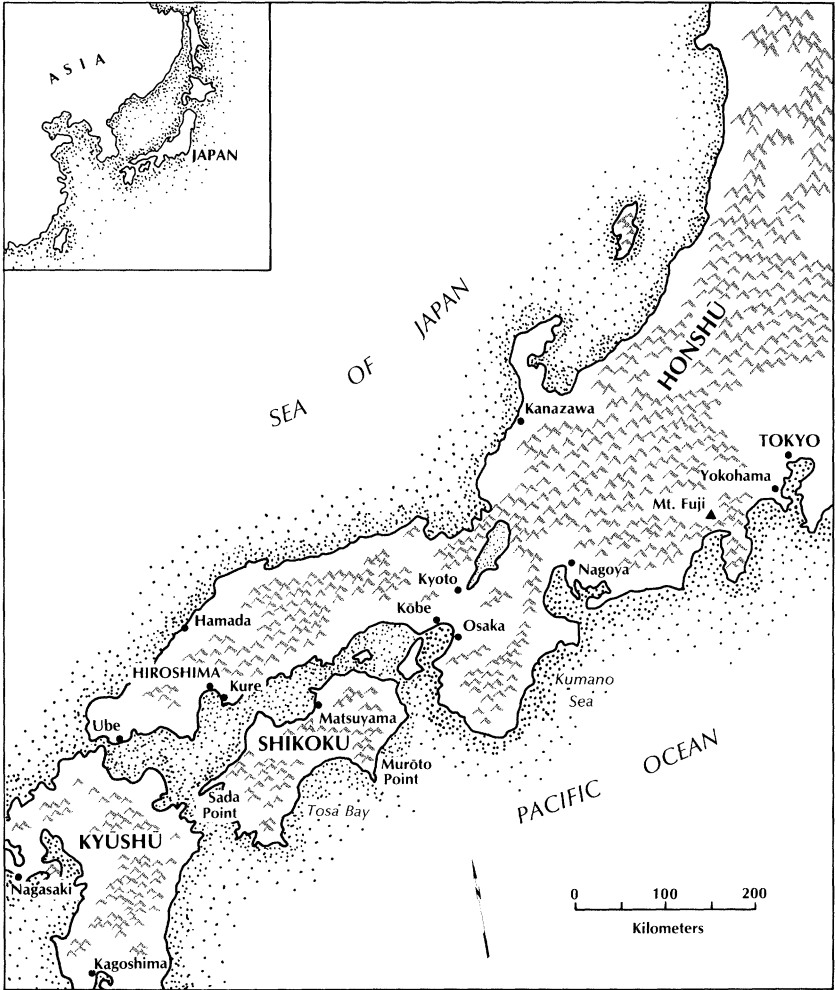
¹⁰ The new chapter in the 1985 edition of Hersey’s *Hiroshima*, “The Aftermath,” is interrupted periodically by news reports presented in italics; for example (p. 179), “*On September 23, 1949, Moscow Radio announced that the Soviet Union had developed an atomic bomb.*” This historical frame for the new chapter serves, surely unintentionally, to underline how bare of historical setting the original *Hiroshima* was.

tenth anniversary of August 6; until that time survivors of Hiroshima were largely ignored, very much on their own. Indeed, the American Occupation of Japan (which lasted until 1952) attempted with considerable success to keep discussion of the atomic bomb from lay audiences in Japan. As we shall see, both Hara Tamiki and Ōta Yōko ran afoul of Occupation censorship. Censorship extended to photographs and even to paintings: in 1950, when Maruki Iri and Maruki Toshi, the premier artists of Hiroshima's atomic experience, exhibited the first of their paintings, they had to change its title from *Atomic Bomb* to *August 6, 1945*. We must be careful not to read history backwards, to attribute to the first postwar decade the nuclear consciousness of a later period.

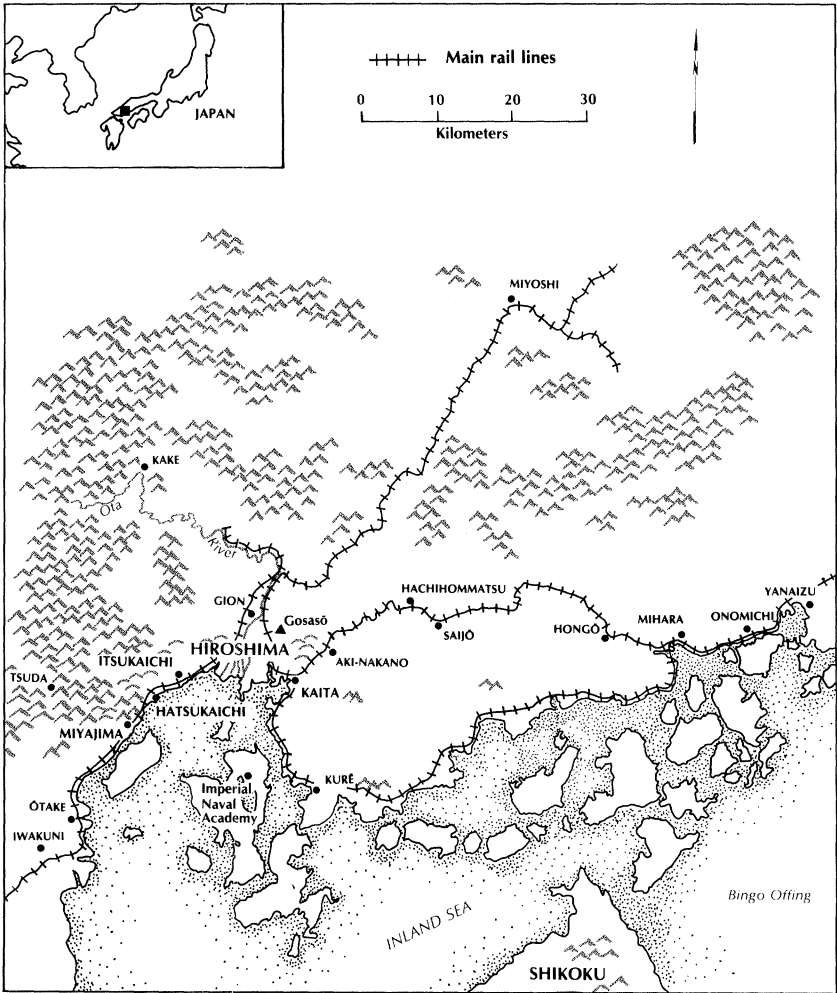
WRITING IN 1924, less than ten years after the outbreak of World War I, the German writer Thomas Mann spoke of the prewar era as being "in the long ago, in the old days, the days of the world before the Great War, with whose beginning so much began that has scarcely left off beginning."¹¹ We are even more justified in saying of Hiroshima and August 6 that with its "beginning so much began that has scarcely left off beginning." Who of us today traces the world's plight to 1914? Who of us today can avoid tracing our plight to August 6?

If Camus is correct, the experience of August 6 might have hardened Hara Tamiki, Ōta Yōko, and Tōge Sankichi to silence; we can be grateful that it did not. They write of their Hiroshimas. Their Hiroshimas help each of us in the construction of our own Hiroshimas. Without their Hiroshimas, we know little of the human truth of Hiroshima. And without the human truth of Hiroshima, we know little of Hiroshima.

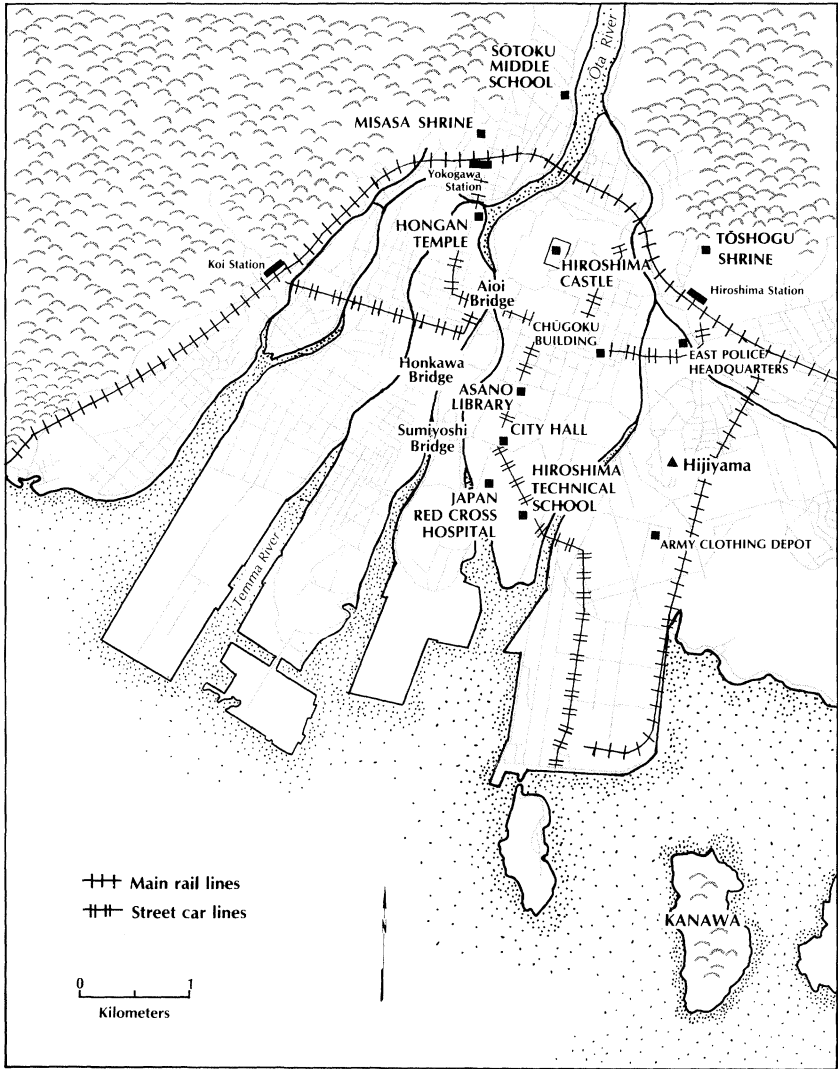
¹¹ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. v; I have made a significant correction in the wording (see Mann, *Der Zauberberg*, in *Thomas Mann: Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3 [Oldenburg: Fischer, 1960], pp. 9–10).



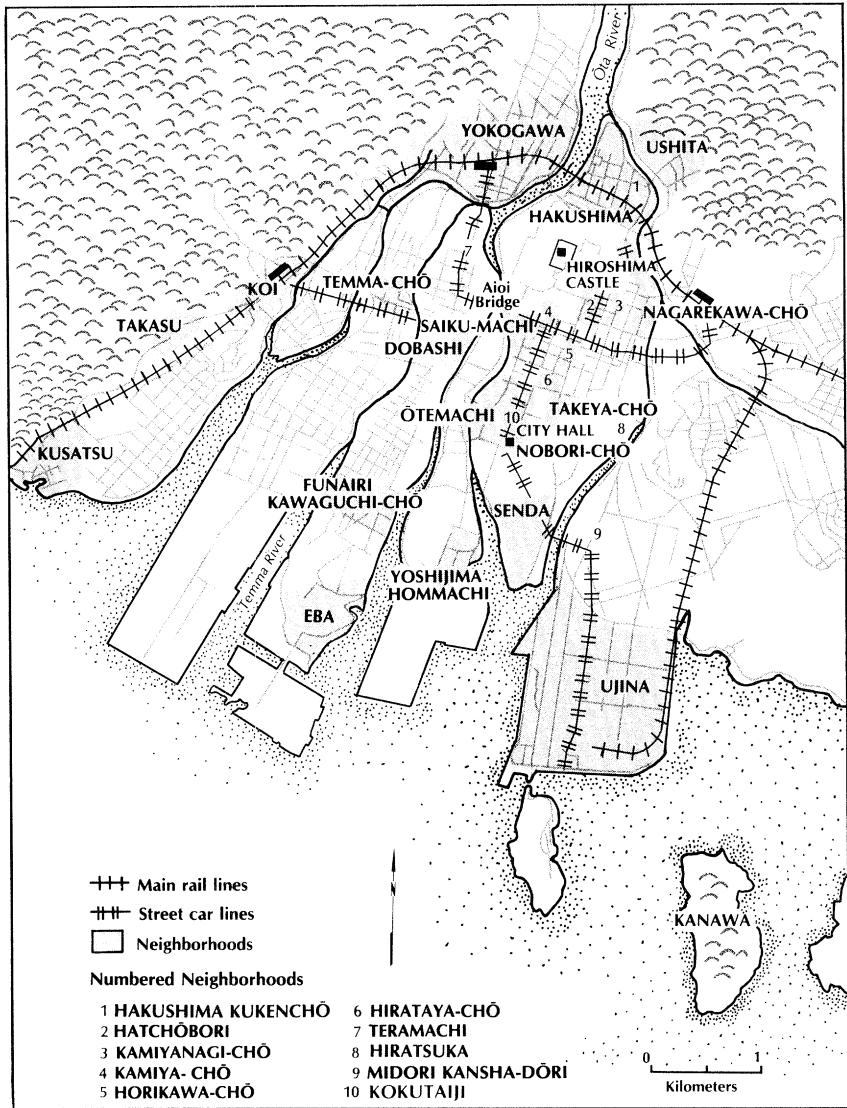
MAP I. Western Japan



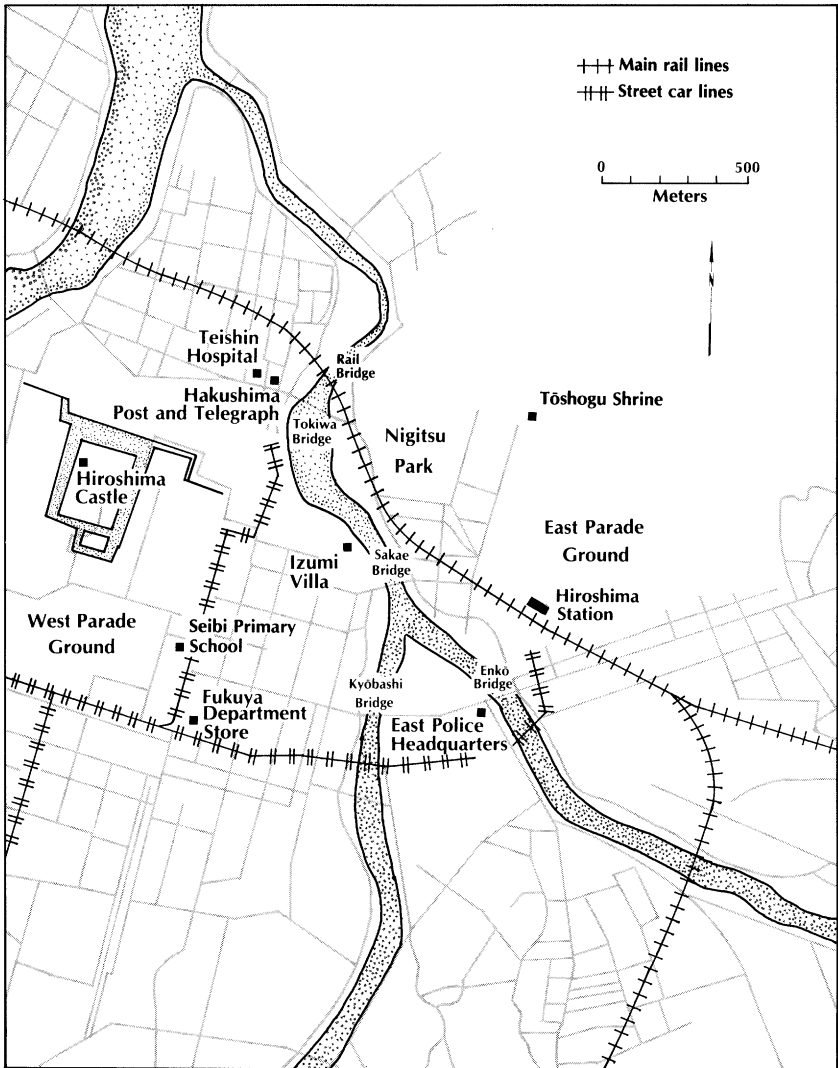
MAP 2. Hiroshima and environs



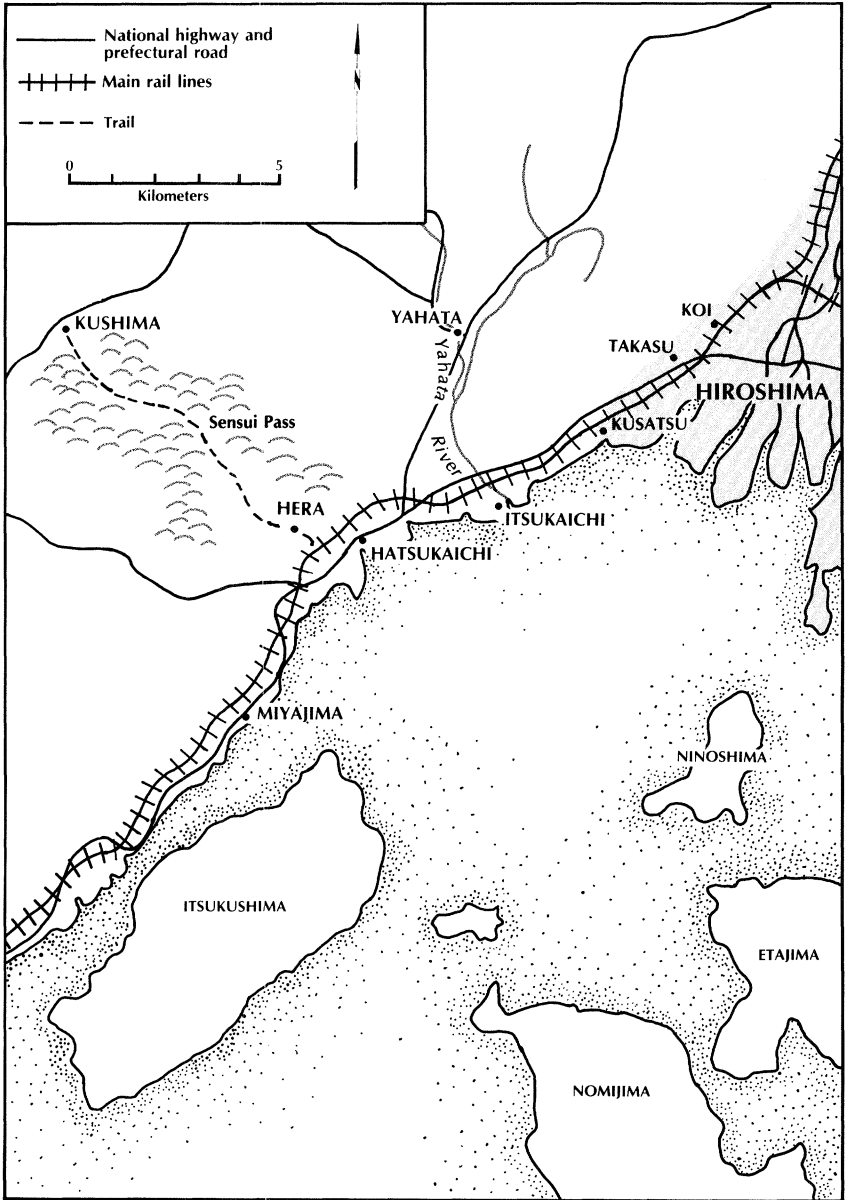
MAP 3. Hiroshima City with selected locations



MAP 4. Hiroshima City with selected neighborhoods



MAP 5. Northeast Hiroshima (detail)



MAP 6. Outlying towns to the west of Hiroshima

Summer Flowers

Translator's Introduction

HARA TAMIKI survived August 6 and devoted much of the remaining six years of his life to recording his experience as a victim. The work for which he is most famous is *Summer Flowers*, a triptych he wrote soon after August 6 and published in its entirety in 1949.

HARA'S FAMILY AND CAREER, 1905–1944

Hara Tamiki was born on November 15, 1905, son of a prosperous businessman.¹ The family factory was located in Kamiyanagi-chō, Hiroshima; the family home was part of the same compound.²

Hara's father and mother began their family in 1891, when his mother was seventeen years old. Their firstborn child was a daughter. The second and third children were sons who died in infancy. The fourth child, the sister to whom Hara was especially close, was born in 1897. After her came a son (1899–1987), who although actually the third son became heir to the family business; in *Summer Flowers* Hara calls him “Jun'ichi” and paints a most unflattering picture of him. A third daughter arrived in 1900, and then came a fourth son, the “Seiji”

¹ For biographical data on Hara, see Yamamoto Kenkichi, Chō Kōta, and Sasaki Kiichi, eds., *Hara Tamiki zenshū* (hereafter simply *Zenshū*), 3 vols. (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1978), 3.404–412, and two biographies: Kawanishi Masaaki, *Hitotsu no ummei—Hara Tamiki ron* (One person's fate—Hara Tamiki) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980), and Kokai Eiji, *Hara Tamiki—Shijin no shi* (Hara Tamiki—Death of a poet) (Tokyo: Kokubunsha, 1978). See also Nakahodo Masanori, *Hara Tamiki nōto* (Notes on Hara Tamiki) (Tokyo: Keisō, 1983). For bibliographical matters, see *Hara Tamiki shiryō mokuroku* (Catalog of Hara Tamiki materials), *Nihon kindai bungakkan shōzō shiryō mokuroku 10* (Tokyo: Nihon kindai bungakkan, 1983). There is an earlier two-volume collected works: *Hara Tamiki zenshū* (Collected works of Hara Tamiki) (Tokyo: Haga Shoten, 1965).

² The chronology in *Zenshū* (3.409) gives Nobori-chō as the address of the family home; another source, dated 1912, gives the neighboring ward, Kamiyanagi-chō, as the location of the Hara weaving factory (Sakakibara Shozo, ed., *Hiroshima-shi chimei sokuin* [Index to place names in the city of Hiroshima] [1912; reprint, Hiroshima: Aki shobō, 1984], appendix, p. 7). John W. Treat writes that Kamiyanagi-chō is now Nobori-chō (Treat, “Atomic Bomb Literature and the Documentary Fallacy,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 14.1:37 [Winter 1988]), but the 1912 source indicates that both Kamiyanagi-chō and Nobori-chō were in existence at that time.



The Hara clan before Hiroshima. Hara Tamiki is seated at left, wearing glasses. His sister Yasuko stands at right rear holding an infant. “Jun’ichi” is seated at center; “Takako,” the wife of “Jun’ichi,” sits immediately to his left. “Seiji” stands just behind Hara Tamiki; the wife of “Seiji” stands at the extreme right. Courtesy Nihon kindai bungakkan

of *Summer Flowers* (1902–1978). Hara Tamiki, born in 1905, was the fifth son and eighth child. A sixth son arrived in 1908. Daughters were born in 1910 and 1912; the second of these is the “Yasuko” of *Summer Flowers*. The twelfth and final child arrived in 1916.

In Japanese families of that class and era, the sequence of birth had considerable significance, establishing not only the rights to succession but also the pecking order. Because he was the senior son, “Jun’ichi” controlled the factory; he hectored “Yasuko”; he and his immediate family ate better than did “Seiji” and the narrator. (Japanese readers of *Summer Flowers* have an easy time keeping all this in mind, for the second element of each of these given names denotes rank in the family. The “ichi” of Jun’ichi means first, the “ji” of Seiji

means second, the “zō” of Shōzō—the name given the author’s persona in “Prelude to Annihilation”—means third.)

The wealth of his family was a significant factor throughout Hara’s life. It enabled him to get a fine private education. It made it possible for him to experience a profligate period in his twenties and made it unnecessary for him to depend upon salaried work for much of his adult life. The family wealth explains the ability of his oldest brother “Jun’ichi” to experiment with a trial separation from his wife “Takako,” and it also explains the presence in their home in 1945 of luxury items such as navel oranges.

Despite the affluence that the Hara family enjoyed, death was a constant presence. The first two sons died before reaching the age of three; the sixth died at age four. Hara was seven when this brother died, twelve when his father died (in 1917), thirteen when his favorite elder sister died (in 1918), nineteen when his eldest sister died (in 1924), thirty-one when his mother died (in 1936). Add to these deaths the death of his beloved wife Sadae in 1944, when Hara was thirty-nine, and it is perhaps not surprising that death occupied so important a part of Hara’s consciousness.

Hara’s father supplied clothing to the Japanese military, and 1905, the year of Hara’s birth, witnessed a remarkable series of Japanese military victories over Russia: the fall of Port Arthur in January, the victory at Mukden in March, the destruction of the Russian Baltic Fleet by Admiral Tōgō in May, all leading to the signing of the Treaty of Portsmouth in September. Stirred by these events, the elder Hara gave his newborn son a name to suit: the people (*tami*) rejoice (*ki*).

The external events of Hara’s life before the bomb can be related quickly. Hara attended schools in Hiroshima from 1912 through 1923. In 1918 he failed the entrance examination for middle school but passed it the second time around a year later. In 1923 he took a year off and immersed himself in literature. Before he left Hiroshima to pursue higher education in Tokyo, Hara had already read widely and published his own poetry. His reading included the great Russian writers of the nineteenth century—Gogol, Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Turgenev; the Bible, to which he had been introduced by his

favorite elder sister; Walt Whitman; and of course the pantheon of Japanese writers.

In 1918, the year of his favorite sister's death, Hara first came into contact with the writing of the German lyric poet Rainer Maria Rilke. From that point on, writes Iida Momo,³ Hara never let Rilke's *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge* out of his grasp. In fact, *The Notebooks* and *Summer Flowers* exhibit striking similarities of form and content. Like *The Notebooks*, *Summer Flowers* is a string of loosely-related episodes/sections; Rilke's volume is as little a novel in the accepted sense as is *Summer Flowers*. Like Rilke, Hara was prey to fears and dreams; like Rilke, he was hypersensitive.

Hara started keeping a diary at the age of twelve; that year he and "Seiji" published the first number of their own journal. One of Hara's youthful poems, written a few years later, concerned the large maple tree that stood in the garden of the Hara home; as we shall see, that tree appears in *Summer Flowers*. The poem reads as follows:

Great maple tree by my window:
O maple, you alone understand me
 to the bottom of my heart.
O maple, you alone understand
 my sorrow today.
O maple, you alone understand
 the loneliness in my breast.
The joys and sorrows that only
 the maple and I share,
and more, the grief and desolation
 that cloud the bright moon of my heart;
My heart—what is it?
 And still stranger:
My body.
O maple, do you know what I am?
Probably not. Nor I, nor anyone else.⁴

³ Iida Momo, "Kaisetsu" (Commentary), in *Hara Tamiki zenshū*, 2 vols. (Tokyo: Haga shoten, 1965), reprinted in *Nihon no gembaku bungaku* (The atomic bomb literature of Japan), 15 vols. (Tokyo: Horupu, 1983), 1.308. There are two two-volume editions of Hara's collected works: *Hara Tamiki sakuhinshū* (Collected works of Hara Tamiki) (Tokyo: Kadogawa shoten, 1953) and *Hara Tamiki zenshū* (Collected works of Hara Tamiki) (Tokyo: Haga shoten, 1965).

⁴ "Kaide" ("Maple"), *Zenshū* 1.687.