

THIS OVERFLOWING LIGHT

BOOKS BY JANINE BEICHMAN

*Masaoka Shiki: His Life and Works* (Cheng & Tsui, 2002)  
*Embracing the Firebird: Yosano Akiko and the Birth of the  
Female Voice in Modern Japanese Poetry* (University of  
Hawaii Press, 2002)

TRANSLATIONS

Harumi (Jakuchō) Setouchi, *The End of Summer*  
(Kodansha International, 1989)  
Makoto Ōoka, *A Poet's Anthology: The Range of Japanese  
Poetry* (Katydid Books, 1994)  
Makoto Ōoka, *Poems for All Seasons: An Anthology of  
Japanese Poetry from Ancient Times to the Present*  
(Kodansha International, 2002)  
Abbess Kasanoin Jikun, *In Iris Fields: Remembrances and  
Poetry* (Tankosha, 2009; with Ann Cary)  
Makoto Ōoka, *Beneath the Sleepless Tossing of the Planets:  
Selected Poems 1972–1989* (Kurodahan Press, 2018)  
Minoru Ozawa, *Well-Versed: Exploring Modern Japanese  
Haiku* (Japan Publishing Industry Foundation for  
Culture, 2021)  
Koka Fukushima, *Koka: A Passion for Ikebana* (Koka  
Fukushima, 2021)

PLAY

*Drifting Fires: An American Nō* (Shichigatsudō Press, 1986)

# THIS OVERFLOWING LIGHT

SELECTED POEMS

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*Rin Ishigaki*

*Translated and with an introduction and notes by*

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## Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	10
<i>A Note on Japanese Names</i>	10
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	11
<i>Bibliographical Note</i>	12
<i>Introduction</i>	15
from <i>Before Me the Soup Pot the Rice Pot and the Bright Burning Flame</i> (Watashi no mae ni aru nabe to okama to moeru hi to, 1959)	
Greetings	43
An Evening Tale	45
In a Hundred Human Bellies	47
Before Me the Soup Pot the Rice Pot and the Bright Burning Flame	48
The Women's Bath	50
There Is in This World	52
The Watcher	53
0	54
The Sea and Apples	56
Roof	57
Poverty	59
The Pay Envelope	60
Getting Ready	62
These Days I	63
Secret	64
This Overflowing Light	65
The Shoes That Fell Off	66

from *Nameplates and More* (Hyōsatsu nado, 1968)

Little Clams	69
Nameplates	70
Living	71
Traveling On	72
Flowers	73
Island	74
Cliff	75
Rakugo	76
Festival of the Blind	78
Seascape	80
Kappa Heaven	82
The Runaway's Song	83
Nursery Rhyme	85
Sprouting	86

from *My Life in Brief* (Ryakureki, 1979)

The Rite	91
The Book of the Dead	92
Yesterday's Faces	93
My Life in Brief	94
Tree	95
The Twilight Crane	96
Customs	97
After the Ceremony	98
Woman	99
Lullaby	100

from *Tender Words* (Yasashii Kotoba, 1984)

Sweetfish 103

*Uncollected*

Goodnight 107

*Notes* 111

*Original Poem Titles* 118



The Industrial Bank of Japan in the 1950s.



*from*

Before Me

the Soup Pot the Rice Pot

and the Bright Burning Flame (1959)

私  
の  
前  
に  
あ  
る  
鍋  
と  
お  
釜  
と  
燃  
え  
る  
火  
と

## Greetings

*On a photograph of the atomic bombing*

Oh, this face  
so horribly burned  
one of the hideous burns of the 250,000  
people who were in Hiroshima  
on August 6 1945

is no longer in this world

and yet  
dear friend  
look again at our faces  
as we turn to each other  
today's healthy faces  
morning's fresh and open faces  
that show no trace of the fires of war

I search those faces for tomorrow's expression  
and I shudder

the earth holds hundreds of atomic bombs  
and you are walking the hair's-breadth border between  
    life and death  
how can you be so tranquil  
and so beautiful

hush listen closely  
don't you hear something approaching  
what we must see plainly is in front of our eyes  
what we must choose  
rests in our hands

eight-fifteen in the morning  
returns each day

all the 250,000 people who died  
in one instant on the morning of August 6 1945  
like you    like me  
who are here now  
were tranquil    were beautiful    were unprepared

*(August 1952)*

## The Sea and Apples

A steamship is passing along the coast of western Izu

from a bus on the cliffs looking down  
you'd see what seems a green field on a quiet day  
but is really the sea  
a glittering green surface  
and slowly, a small boat moving across it

I was in that boat,  
the deck was plenty big enough for me  
the sea was brimful to the boat's gunwale  
the sea was brimful to the shore too  
in the palm of my hand I happily held  
a red apple  
larger than my palm and just the right weight

October, an autumn overflowing with ripe apples  
and a boat supported by the tides  
and me supported by the boat

Oh sea  
I felt your weight in the palm of my hand,  
in the distance Fuji was standing  
cloudless  
I was standing on the deck  
everything swayed

a steamship is passing by the coast of western Izu,

from a village path you'd see it disappear behind a tiny island  
it's small, that boat

## Roof

Japanese houses have low roofs  
the poorer the family the lower the roof,

the lowness of the roof

weighs me down

Where does the heaviness come from  
I step back a little to take a good look  
what's above the house  
is not the blue of the sky but  
something the deep dark color of blood

Something that clutches me and bars the way  
something that traps me in this cramped dwelling  
and sucks up my strength,

my invalid father lives up on the roof  
so do my stepmother  
and my brothers too

On top of that flimsy  
corrugated tin roof  
of barely 10 *tsubo*  
that flaps and rattles  
in a puff of wind,  
I see a fat white daikon  
and some rice  
and a nice warm bed

Carry me says this roof  
and under its weight  
I, a woman, feel my spring darken  
in the distance the sun goes down

## Poverty

When I start grumbling  
my father says  
'Try to be patient, I'll be out of the way soon'  
as if he was a piece of old furniture

That's no comfort  
that's a threat I say  
losing my temper, but

when my grandfather died last year  
he left behind one tatami mat of extra space,  
which in this cramped house was a huge help

I wept as I walked in the funeral procession but  
the near and distant relatives  
all murmured consolingly  
'That's a load off your shoulders now,'  
and that was the farewell,  
to the grandfather who loved me best of all

A year later my father  
now half-paralyzed in the same way  
soothes me from the bed he  
shares with my invalid step-mother saying  
it won't be long now just try to put up with it,

a day will come when these terrible memories  
will replace my living father  
and from these recollections there will be  
no exit

## Getting Ready

Is that decay

that eager moment when a hundred thousand trees  
as one shrug off their every leaf from top to toe

the sun pours down its clear gaze so intently  
that their bodies almost burn  
the wind clings to their branches crying peel off those clothes

then apple branches sag beneath their own weight  
and the juice of the grapes grows heavy, sweetness  
dribbling from rounded fruits

autumn  
this opulent autumn  
what is there to regret, what to mourn  
all I have I fling away  
stretch my hands to the sky  
this is all my will, all my desire!

With each day the sky grows clearer, brighter, deeper  
I become a tree arrowing through its very depths

is that decay,  
that eager moment when as one the trees  
shrug off their every leaf from top to toe –

never have I known my life as I do now  
deep within my body, I embrace a distant spring  
and my face turns quietly towards winter, ready, waiting



## Tree

I went to that crematory for the first time in  
a long while to say good-bye to an old friend

Forty years ago when she was four my little  
sister turned to ashes in the same oven

That tree was standing in the garden  
then too

Don't trees have eyes?  
Or is it only that they keep them closed?

If so, when it opens its eyes  
that tree will be amazed and say  
*What a terrible thing I've done*  
*I've overlooked things of major importance*

Such an old tree, I thought to myself  
seeing it this time

It's stood by at the deaths  
of so many people

You good-for-nothing  
you're like me  
just standing there not knowing the meaning of death

The tree murmured  
*Okay, maybe*  
*when they carry you in I'll open my eyes*