

## BOOK REVIEWS

# Black Eggs

## Poems

BY KURIHARA SADAKO

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND NOTES  
BY RICHARD H. MINEAR

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN: CENTER FOR JAPANESE STUDIES

THE UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN  
108 LANE HALL, ANN ARBOR, MI 48109-1290

1994. XVIII + 329 PAGES

**K**urihara Sadako is first and foremost not a poet. Rather, she is an advocate of world peace, which stems in part from her eyewitness account of the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima and its legacy. The remaining portion of her advocacy stems from her need to express her views. Her voice uses poetry as a medium to support her dream of world peace. This poetic voice reveals the horrors of the world for which she dreams only of peace. At times it weeps in despair; at other times, it sings of hope and promise. Yet, as Richard Minear points out in his truly engaging introduction, in the most basic sense Kurihara writes for herself.

While Kurihara is not one of Japan's best contemporary poets, she clearly is one of the country's most important artists. Minear has assembled a collection of Kurihara's works which he describes poignantly as "a body of poetry that will surely stand as one of the major artistic testimonies to life in the nuclear age." It is a treatise of intellectual and social history.

Portions of Kurihara's earliest works are, as she describes in the introduction to *Black Eggs*, naive. Still, the maturation of her artistry represented in this collection runs parallel to the development of Japan as a modern industrialized nation. The collection opens with *Kuroi Tamago* (*Black Eggs*, 1946) in its entirety. There is also a 1983 edition of the title poem with a preface explaining the American Occupational censoring of the 1946 version.

Later poems, 1967 to the present, are arranged thematically and are a testament to the history of post-WWII Japan and Asia. This collection transcends the genre of "atomic bomb literature" by including poems addressing significant events of the last forty-five years. Many poems include explanatory footnotes and dates of composition from Kurihara. The notes are indispensable to the reader because they set the stage for the poetic inspiration and offer students constructive insight into Kurihara's poetry. Her topical poems range from the treatment of the American presence in Japan (*American Pigweed*) to the controversial role of the Emperor (*Human Emperor: Meek and Mild* and *His Majesty has Donkey Ears*). Poems within each grouping are arranged chronologically.

Even when working with such a superb text, I still hope for more. My only wish is that the text would have included the original Japanese poems similar to the *Katydid* series (*Asian Poetry in Translation: Japan*, edited by Thomas Fitzsimmons) of Tamura

Ryuichi and Kinoshita Yuji. The *Katydid* series is useful for introductory and advanced literature and translation seminars. Students have ready access to both the originals and translations, thereby gaining an understanding of, and an appreciation of, the translation process. However, disregarding my wish, this text is flawless. With the exception of Christopher Drake's collection by Tamura Ryuichi entitled *Dead Languages, Selected Poems 1946-1984*, there is perhaps no collection of a modern Japanese poet better translated or better annotated. Professor Minear's work is a work of passion. It is an accomplishment worthy of the highest recommendation.

Educators and students alike will benefit immensely from exposure to this collection. The application and use of this book, or at least portions of it, are recommended for courses of contemporary Japanese history, culture, literature, politics, or for a course/seminar that designates the understanding of an important voice of twentieth century Japan as its goal. It should also be required for any course on "atomic bomb" literature. *Black Eggs* contains examples of free verse and *tanka*. Instructors who use this text can illuminate the difference between these two forms in teaching students to fully appreciate the complexity of their precarious coexistence within contemporary Japanese poetry.

I have used the book in introductory courses of contemporary Japanese literature in translation, and the selection has proven successful. Students have been very receptive to the book as a whole, often wanting to spend more time discussing Kurihara's poetry than I had allotted. The poems fuel discussion incorporating poetry and politics. I also recommend Kijima Hajime's *The Poetry of Postwar Japan* (University of Iowa Press, 1975) and James Kirkup's *Modern Japanese Poetry* (University of Queensland Press, 1978) as excellent texts for contemporary Japanese literature and poetry courses. ■

David Andrew Schmidt

**DAVID SCHMIDT** teaches Japanese at William Woods University, is a private consultant/translator, and is the President of *Asia Link, Inc.*

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