

# Irradiated Cities

Mariko Nagai

LES FIGURES  
PRESS

The before, the after, and the event that divides. In *Irradiated Cities*, Mariko Nagai seeks the dividing events of nuclear catastrophe in Japan, exploring the aftermath of the bombings at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and the nuclear meltdown at Fukushima. Nagai's lyric textual fragments and stark black-and-white photographs act as a guide through these spaces of loss, silence, echo, devastation, and memory. And haunting each shard and each page an enduring irradiation, the deadly residue of catastrophe that leaks into our DNA.

Winner of the **2015 NOS Book Contest**,  
as selected by guest judge lê thi diem thúy.

## PRAISE FOR *Irradiated Cities*

This book, a sifting and circling, a calm and masterful layering of voices and vantage points, a slowly emerging portrait of four different Japanese cities and their inhabitants, resists any effort at arrivals or conclusions. By doing so, it shows us that while we may have an accumulation of facts for what happened on a particular day in a particular place, perhaps even the names and words and pictures of the people to whom catastrophe struck, and would not let go, it is within the dark sedimentation and the feather-light drift of history that we might glean what yet remains, and gives off light, to summon and trouble us still.”

– lê thi diem thúy

## ABOUT Mariko Nagai

Having grown up in Europe and America, Mariko Nagai studied English with a concentration in poetry at New York University where she was the Erich Maria Remarque Fellow. She has received the Pushcart Prizes both in poetry and fiction (nominated five times in total) and has received fellowships from the Rockefeller Foundation Bellagio Center, UNESCO-Aschberg Bursaries for the Arts, Akademie Schloss Solitude, Yaddo, and Hawthornden International Writers Retreat, to name a few. She is the author of *Histories of Bodies: Poems* (2007), *Georgic: Stories in 2009* (2010), *Instructions for the Living* (2012) and *Dust of Eden: A Novel* (2014). Vietnamese and Romanian translations of *Georgic: Stories* were published in 2015. She currently lives in Tokyo and is an Associate Professor of Creative Writing and Japanese Literature at Temple University Japan Campus.

*Irradiated Cities*  
Mariko Nagai  
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## ADDITIONAL PRAISE FOR *Irradiated Cities*

“Writing in the long shadow of history and social progress following atomic bombings in Japan, the poet admits that ‘suffering is photogenic’ and so is its aftermath. Hauntingly and almost rhythmically juxtaposed, these poems, full of critical to devastated voices opening out into other voices, and images—shadowy, stark, implicit and adumbrative, foregrounding casual scenes and objects to shattered edifices, hinting of past and present trauma and resiliences—document not only the horrific squalor of previous suffering, but also the subtler ironies, painful contradictions and social ambivalences surrounding contemporary encounters with nuclear energy.”

– Cyril Wong

“She articulates the impossible—suffering, grief, loss, memory, guilt, complicity, silence, traces, fallout, echoes, the critical link between nuclear power and nuclear weapons : This is a book that everyone should read : Like Svetlana Alexievich’s *Voices from Chernobyl*, *Irradiated Cities* is a brilliant requiem for our future : a testament to our conflicted past : a declaration of proof of our troubling present that teeters on the edge : :”

– elin o’Hara slavick, author of *After Hiroshima* and *Bomb After Bomb: A Violent Cartography*

“While visiting Mariko Nagai’s *Irradiated Cities*, I became conscious, self-conscious even, of the book, the writing and photographs, as the revelation of a skin. The skin of irradiated cities—their people and their landscapes—and the record of what and how they endured, and continue to endure, as the bearers of Japan’s (the world’s) unremitting nuclear traumas.”

– Brandon Shimoda, author of *Evening Oracle*, winner of the William Carlos Williams Award

“Nagai traces threads of event, aftermath and inheritance, weaving her way through generations and locations, revealed in snapshots, of the eye, of the mind, and of the spirit.”

– Robert Jacobs, author of *The Dragon’s Tail: Americans Face the Atomic Age*

“Nagai engages a journalist’s detachment with an empathic, unwavering gaze, making *Irradiated Cities* much more than a historical document. Starkly abstract black-and-white photographs provide spaces of stillness between sections, as well as wordless commentary. This is a powerful, deeply researched, and searing work that refuses foreclosure while continually challenging the reader to think and feel.”

– Mari L’Esperance, author of *The Darkened Temple*

“What a masterly, sharp, irradiated and illuminated book this is. The prose, the lyrical bluntness, the innate anger is so strong. And what a powerful correspondence between the text and the photos that also seem irradiated; with silence, shadows, stories never told and of course, sorrow. *Irradiated Cities* is a mesmerizing book written by an amazingly wise and sensitive writer, Mariko Nagai.”

– Dorthe Nors, author of *So Much for that Winter*

“So often is poetry a reminder that the world is crumpling and that we are falling apart. *Irradiated Cities* goes beyond this. The juxtaposition of everyday images and poetic reenactment about traumas experienced by Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Tokyo and Fukushima haunts and begs us to confront both the cities and ourselves in pieces. In this unique collection, those cities are humans—bigger but sadder than us. They live with their pasts. But what does it mean to survive from them, when we do not even look back at ‘what it means to remain as living and having lived?’ *Irradiated Cities* is one of the very few contemporary poetry books about Japan written in English with craft, urgency and quandary. Nagai is a major global poetic voice.”

– Nicholas Wong, author of *Crevasse*, winner of the Lambda Literary Award

“Exquisite, powerful, and heartbreaking, *Irradiated Cities* is essential reading for world leaders and citizens alike, so that we can grasp, at a level beyond words, what we as humans are capable of—and how, if we choose, we might change the course of history for generations beyond our own.”

– Susan Southard, author of *Nagasaki: Life After Nuclear War*

“IT IS THE LAST NOTE THAT STILL LINGERS IN THE AIR”