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**Dark Night of the Soul: Catholic Articulations of Atomic Trauma in Seirai
Yuichi's *Ground Zero, Nagasaki***

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Abstract

This paper discusses how the Catholic faith of the *hibakusha* (atomic bomb victims), their families, and their community members shapes their understanding of the atomic bombing in Seirai Yuichi's fiction work *Ground Zero, Nagasaki*. In re-emphasizing the preeminence of the individual atomic experience and moving away from the canonical Nagasaki atomic narratives of Nagai Takashi and Hayashi Kyoko, Seirai illuminates the essential role that familial connection to the faith plays in an individual's personal belief and how that belief thus affects one's interpretation of the bombing. When the bonds of family are broken, post-atomic faith begins to falter and survivors enter a Dark Night of the Soul in which, caught between belief and doubt, hope and trauma, they seek meaning. Seirai explores these moments of searching within this traumatic gray space in his text, illustrating how atomic warfare destroys the self of the faithless individual.

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Gloria in excelsis Deo.

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Introduction

When the city of Nagasaki was destroyed by an atomic bomb on August 9, 1945, the Catholic survivors of the attack were faced with an enormous question: how could their benevolent God allow an act of violence—on a level unseen on earth until and since that day—against a people already burdened with an abysmal history of persecution? Some believers found their faith strengthened, insisting that this was another test from God—a sign that they were a chosen martyr people like the Jews of the Old Testament. Others lost their faith, concluding that violence of this degree disproved the existence of the God they had formerly believed in. Yet most fell somewhere in between, yearning to maintain the faith that generations of their ancestors had sacrificed their lives for and yet struggling with the doubt that now shadowed their piety. Seirai Yuichi's *Ground Zero, Nagasaki* takes up these first- and second- generation survivors (*hibakusha*) in their time of searching. For some, it is years after the bombing when they find the time to reflect upon the atomic attack, when the roar of trauma from their youth rises out of the quiet of old age. Others only understand the bombing through the narratives of their family members and neighbors as they struggle to make decisions in a worldview framed by deep familial trauma. In each narrative, the men and women left behind in the wake of the nuclear attack chronicle how familial religious belief can form one's experience and perception of atomic trauma.

Ground Zero is comprised of six stories in total, each articulation singular in their subject, discourse, and scope, and arranged in the order that follows. *Nails* describes a husband and wife's struggle with their son who, overcome by an unknown mental illness, has murdered his wife. In the cottage in their backyard—the same land where their martyred and surviving family members experienced the bomb—they discover a room full of nails driven into the walls

where their son used to live after his illness beset him. *Stone* narrates the story of a mentally disabled man who works to gain an audience with an old friend, now a controversial politician, who he hopes will care for him after his ailing elderly mother, a Nagasaki Catholic, passes. *Insects* details a *hibakusha*'s struggle with attraction to a man whom she can never have, the duty of piety she feels placed upon her by her family's faith, and the clash of religion, sin, and desire. *Honey* is the narrative of an entitled, upper-class woman who marries into a Nagasaki Catholic family and her experience cheating on her husband with a younger boy on the memorial of the bombing. *Shells* is the story of a man who seems to fall into insanity after the death of his young daughter and sees shells everywhere around him, believing that the ocean washes over the land at night. This change in his mental state calls him to deeply question what occurs when you lose sight of God. Lastly, *Birds* concludes Seirai's collection with the narrative of an elderly couple, comprised of an orphan *hibakusha* and his wife, who hear frightening noises one night and fall into fearfully contemplating what the noise, and their whole lives, might mean as the only surviving members of their family. They eventually discover that the noise is coming from a white bird tangled in a net and stuck on their roof. The man believes that the bird is the soul of his mother.

Seirai's work exposes the struggles of faith which defined the atomic experience of the Nagasaki Catholics and, in particular, the struggle of post-atomic faith. Through *Ground Zero*, Seirai illustrates that atomic survivorship does not necessarily result in confirmation or destruction of one's religious beliefs. When faced with a trauma as utterly inconceivable as atomic warfare, it is impossible to hold precisely the same beliefs as before; some may be strengthened, others weakened, and many find themselves somewhere in between—in the midst of a Dark Night of the Soul. In this period of questioning, Seirai illuminates that when faith is

connected to a family identity, as in the case of the Nagasaki people, it exhibits a surprising tenacity even in face of great disturbance. It is only when the bonds of family are broken, when an individual strikes out on their own, that the faith falters. And when faith falters, atomic warfare becomes the symbol of each man or woman's loss of self; they find themselves in a post-atomic wasteland—a purgatory—stripped of every thread of physical, emotional, and spiritual humanity. Seirai Yuichi describes this traumatic space, placed between the absolutes of faith and unbelief, in *Ground Zero, Nagasaki*.

Literature Review

Atomic bomb literature (*Genbaku bungaku*) in Japan encompasses many categories, including testimonial literature, memoir, fiction, drama, and poetry. The works detail the narratives and emotions of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bomb survivors (*hibakusha*), their families, and people close to them. While many works of Atomic bomb literature are written by hibakusha, second- and third-generation atomic bomb survivors and even individuals who did not directly experience the atomic bombings or have a family connection to hibakusha have written works. Seirai Yuichi is not a hibakusha, but his parents, his grandparents, and many of those he grew up knowing in Nagasaki were and, as a result, he feels a profound sense of duty to tell the narratives of those who survived. Additionally, although the philosophies and religions of atomic literature authors are varied, a sizable portion of those works written about or within Nagasaki are written from the Catholic perspective—including Seirai's own works. In order to understand how Seirai's *Ground Zero* provides insight into how Catholic culture affects the *hibakusha* experience, it is essential to view the book in context of the surrounding atomic literature.

First-hand or testimonial literature, which is most often written by non-professionals and compiled by editors, comprises the largest category of atomic literature. Hiroshima writer Yamashiro Tomoe compiled *Surviving the Bomb: Atomic-bomb Victim Memoirs* (1953), which contains twenty-seven personal accounts of *hibakusha* who experienced particularly severe emotional or physical trauma. A second compilation of similar testimonies from Nagasaki was created by editor Kamata Sadao and titled *Nagasaki Testimonies* (1969-78). Hachiya Michihiko's *Hiroshima Diary* is composed of carefully selected and verified reports of the events which occurred in the hospital. Other testimonial accounts continue to appear in recent years in publications such as *The New York Times* and *National Geographic* on the anniversaries of the bombings. (Beser, 2015) (Rich, 2016)

Atomic fiction and non-fiction writings by *hibakusha* are also prolific. Otā Yoko, whose account of the bombing titled *City of Corpses* was published in 1945, and Hara Tamiki, who published his *Summer Flowers* in the same year, are two of the most famous authors from Hiroshima. Both texts were severely delayed due to U.S.-imposed censorship about the atomic narrative and were not released from censorship until 1948. John Treat argues, however, that Hiroshima survivor Takenishi Hiroko's *The Rite* (1963) is one of the most successful works of Hiroshima atomic literature as it depicts a woman's search for a means of closure after the deaths of those around her and her inability to come to terms with death caused through such an incomprehensibly violent reality. There is notably less *hibakusha* atomic literature written by Nagasaki authors. Of these, Hayashi Kyoko is perhaps the most well-known Nagasaki *hibakusha* author. She has written several autobiographical and semi-fictional narratives of the atomic bombing, including *Procession on a Cloudy Day*, *Ritual of Death*, *Two Grave Markers*, and *Cut*

Glass, Blown Glass amongst many others.ⁱ Her narratives center upon the issues of historical and emotional isolation of atomic bomb victims and survivors. *Hibakusha* literature, whether fiction or semi-fiction, from Hiroshima or Nagasaki, offers powerful and irreplaceable insight into the atomic experience.

There are also numerous works of atomic literature which were completed by Japanese authors who either lived in Hiroshima or Nagasaki in the past or who are Japanese nationals. Including Japanese poet Takehiko Fukunaga's *The Island of Death* (1971), Sōkun Kawakami's *The Survivors*, and Kazumi Takahashi's *The Melancholy Faction*. None of these authors had any direct relation to the bombing beyond their nationality. Ibuse Masuji's *Black Rain* (1965) is the most widely read atomic novel in Japan and abroad. Ibuse is also not a *hibakusha*, but drew upon his familiarity with Hiroshima, the experiences of those survivors whom he knew, and the diaries of *hibakusha* in order to compose his narrative. These narratives written by non-*hibakusha* Japanese share a modest level of similarity in content to those written by *hibakusha* except in that they tend to focus less on the descriptions of physical pain experienced by individuals and instead tend to make comparisons to other examples of great suffering in Japanese national history, such as wartime and the experience of soldiers. By comparison, *hibakusha* literature tends to not relate itself to a national identity, but instead is driven by the lived trauma of the author.

During the 1980's, Ōe Kenzaburo—a fictionist, essayist, and a leading figure in modern Japanese literature—became one of the premier voices for atomic literature within intellectual circles. He is among those Japanese authors who are not *hibakusha*, but feels it is his duty as a

ⁱ Of these novels only *Ritual of Death* (1978) and *Two Grave Markers* (1989) have been translated into English. Others include *Yellow Sand* (1991) and *From Trinity to Trinity* (2010).

Japanese citizen to promote atomic literature. In addition to pushing for the publication of numerous relatively unknown *hibakusha* works, Ōe has personally published a work titled *Hiroshima Notes*, which, though a compilation of essays which discussed the evolution of *hibakusha* culture after the bombings, Ōe argues (though some disagree) is a work of prose to be placed within the realm of atomic literature.

The first English text to account the atomic bombing was written by American journalist John Hersey and became widely circulated after it first appeared in the *New Yorker* in 1946. Due to the fact that his narrative was promoted by the U.S. government—unlike those written by *hibakusha*, which were blocked under U.S. censorship—scholars, including Yuko Shibata, a fellow at the International Peace Research Institute at Meiji Gakuin University, argue that “Hersey’s *Hiroshima* formed the basis for the normative narrative pattern of the *hibakusha*’s experience in Japan as well [as in the West].” (Shibata, 2018) In Hersey’s account, an omnipotent narrator speaks from above, with little concern for the *hibakusha*’s individual voices. This places the tragedy as something which has occurred in the past and will not recreate itself in the future. Shibata claims that Hersey’s work directly influenced the equally popular book—and later song and film adaptation—*The Bells of Nagasaki* written by Nagai Takashi. She claims that “both texts share parallels in their narratological strategies, such as historic emplotment, compartmentalized knowledge, and the valorization of the atomic bomb’s power.” (Shibata, 2018, p. 11) The relationship between the two narratives “mirror the power dynamics” between the two nations and, as Shibata argues, contributes to a conclusion about the atomic bombing in literature as well as in popular culture that ignores the existence of non-Japanese *hibakusha* and the responsibility of Japanese colonialism. (Shibata, 2018, p. 11)

An important distinction to make within atomic literature, regardless of the exact relation of its author to the bombing, is that of its geographic origin—whether it was produced in or about Hiroshima or Nagasaki. The number of works of Nagasaki atomic literature is surprisingly small in comparison to the number produced in Hiroshima. This was so disturbing to the Nagasaki Literature Society (*Nagasaki Bungaku Kondankai*) that they printed a special issue of the literary journal *The Native (Chijin)* ten years after the bombing which asked: “why has Nagasaki, unlike Hiroshima, not produced a real (*honkakuteki*) atomic-bomb literature?” (Treat, 1995, p. 303) The responses failed to create a completely unified answer as to why, but most felt that the issues were largely due to the fact that Nagasaki is understood as “markedly different from other Japanese cities, which is to say different from other regional cultures collectively and affirmatively held to be somehow more consistently ‘Japanese.’” (Treat, 1995, p. 303) The source of this difference is Nagasaki’s history as the country’s port to the Western world in the 16th through 19th centuries and, in particular, the Roman Catholic culture which has taken root in the area, which creates a degree of “foreignness” in comparison to the rest of Japan. Nagasaki’s particular cultural background as the only Japanese Christian city in the nation offers starkly different cultural material for authors to draw from. As Treat explains, “Japanese contempt for Christianity as a ‘foreign,’ ‘alien’ system of unhealthy, certainly unpeaceable, beliefs is popularly conflated with another intractable contempt for atomic-bomb literature itself as an unnecessarily, uncomfortable morose genre of writing.” (Treat, 1995, p. 306) While the blanket label of Nagasaki as a Christian city fails to take into account the broad range of cultures present there and in literary circles, there remains a detectable prejudice against Nagasaki due to its history as a portal of Western influence (and to Christian influence, more specifically) which only serves to further seclude the atomic literature which springs from it. This is important to

consider when viewing the examples of Nagasaki atomic literature which do exist and especially those which are composed within a Catholic culture, as Seirai Yuichi's *Ground Zero* is.

The number of works that fall under the category Nagasaki-Christian atomic literature is thus an even smaller and more specific category of Nagasaki atomic literature. One of the most popular works is Nagai Takashi's *The Bells of Nagasaki* (mentioned above). Nagai claimed that the bombing of Nagasaki was a gift from God in which those who died were holy martyrs taken up to heaven, while those who survived were left behind in order to repent and save themselves from sin and death. This radical premise is best understood in Nagai's own words, delivered on November 3rd, 1945, nearly three months after the attack, at a Requiem Mass:

Is there not a profound relationship between the destruction of Nagasaki and the end of the war? Nagasaki, the only holy place in all Japan—was it not chosen as a victim, a pure lamb, to be slaughtered and burned on the altar of sacrifice to expiate the sins committed by humanity in the Second World War?...

How noble, how splendid was that holocaust of August 9, when flames soared up from the cathedral, dispelling the darkness of war and bringing the light of peace! In the very depth of our grief we reverently saw here something beautiful, something pure, something sublime. Eight thousand [Christians], together with their priests, burning with pure smoke, entered into eternal life. All without exception were good people whom we deeply mourn...

Why did we not die with them on that day, at that time in [the Urakami Cathedral]? Why must we alone continue this miserable existence? It is because we are sinners. Ah! Now indeed we are forced to see the enormity of our sins! It is because I have not made expiation for my sins that I am left behind. Those are left were so deeply rooted in sin that they were not worthy to be offered to God. (Goodman, 1986)

Aspects of Nagai's claims about martyrdom continue to be present in the perspectives of some hibakusha almost 70 years after the bomb was dropped. In an interview with National

Geographic, Shigemi Fukahori, who was 14 at the time of the bombing, believes, “In Japan World War II started on December 8th, the same day as the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. It also ended on August 15th the day of the Assumption of Mary. The bomb exploded over Urakami Valley; the highest number of Christians in Nagasaki live there. I believe the war ended because of our sacrifice.” (Beser, 2015)

Many Nagasaki-Christian atomic literature authors mirror the claims or sentiments of Nagai and draw connections between the suffering of the Nagasaki Christians throughout history and the Catholic experience of the atomic bombing. Inoue Mitsuharu’s *The House of Hands* mirrors the hiding of young female *hibakusha* to the hiding of the hidden Christians (*kakure kirishitans*) in earlier centuries. Tanaka Chikao’s *The Head of Mary (Maria no kubi)* work of atomic drama details the efforts of a group of Nagasaki Catholics to reassemble a statue of the Virgin Mary destroyed in the bombing. At the conclusion of the play, the partly restored statue speaks to the startled group with words of love and comfort, illustrating the “embrace of martyrdom as a response to the continuing legacy of the degradation and humiliation of Christians, and by extension *hibakusha*, in Japan.” (Treat, 1995, p. 309) That is, the atomic bomb was not separate from God’s plan and that sacrificial death in the bombing was a sign of holiness, while survival meant that you were a sinner, but one whom God was giving another chance to right one’s wrongs.

Not all of the atomic bomb literature coming out of Nagasaki is Catholic however. Hayashi Kyoko, perhaps the most well-known Nagasaki atomic author, does not examine or engage the faith of the hundreds of Nagasaki Catholics who reside in the area, or those Catholics who perished in the atomic blast. Despite this fact, she seeks to be the tribal chronicler (*kataribe*) of the Nagasaki atomic narrative, as her character describes in her work *As If Not*. In this role,

her works are defined by a profound nihilism, per her own atheism, which she felt was confirmed by the astronomic trauma of the bombing. (Treat, 1995, p. 326) This nihilism results in a complete lack of hope or meaning for the future of Nagasaki; when she “speaks of ‘human dignity,’ for instance, it is always within brackets. She frankly does not believe that such terms, post-Nagasaki, retain any identifiably meaningful referent.”ⁱⁱ (Ibid)

Treat makes a claim that Hayashi Kyoko and Nagai Takashi form two of the strongest Nagasaki narratives in that they both illustrate what he terms a “chronology of suffering.” As Nagai illustrates a “chronology of suffering” which dates back to the Shimbara martyrs in the seventeenth century, Hayashi argues a “chronology of suffering” into the future as *hibakusha* fear the genetic damage which may lie in wait for future Nagasaki generations. Treat argues that Hayashi’s “chronology of suffering,” which is far more extensive than what is written about by Hiroshima authors, “represents a complementary, common ground with Nagai, ground important in defining what constitutes ‘Nagasaki atomic-bomb literature’ as distinct from Hiroshima.” (Treat, 1995, p. 326) Whereas the authors of Hiroshima tend to see the bombing as a one-time traumatic event, the authors of Nagasaki see the bombing as one event in a continued chronology of suffering. While it is impossible to claim that one singular narrative encompasses the spectrum of experience present in Nagasaki, this chronology lends a level of cohesivity to the collective Nagasaki atomic memory and narrative.

On the other hand, Nagai’s works and those works which echo his ardent beliefs are defined by a profound (and arguably blind) faith, one that even Pope John Paul II discouraged Nagasaki Catholics from believing in. This faith is one that glorifies the bomb as the start to a

ⁱⁱ “Equally useless to her are such concepts as ‘humanity’ or ‘modernity,’ ideas implying an ameliorable, civilized condition: an implication that she regards as void in the wake of the barbarity of nuclear weapons.” (Treat, 1995, p. 326)

bright future in which all are called to repent and thus to be saved from sin and death. While Nagai's interpretation of the bombing has been repeatedly referenced in public and continues to be referenced in popular culture, it has been discouraged by John Paul II, and according to Treat, been supplanted by Hayashi's writing as the more revered and sophisticated work of literature. These two interpretations of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, one as another meaningless act of a fundamentally self-serving humanity, per Hayashi's nihilist stance, and the other as a gift from God, per Nagai's zealous faith are arguably the two most famous interpretations of the atomic bomb's meaning for the people of Nagasaki. Seirai Yuichi's work *Ground Zero* explores the ground between these two interpretations—the struggle between faith and horrific trauma—between moments of religious clarity, doubt, uncertainty, and attenuated belief.

In this way, Seirai is placed as one of the few works of Nagasaki-Christian atomic literature and yet he illustrates a fundamentally different narrative from the two former premier Nagasaki atomic authors. He depicts the Nagasaki experience as a Dark Night of the Soul—a period of isolation and trauma in which an individual of faith feels that there is no light and no hope. He does not seek to make meaning or non-meaning, as Nagai and Hayashi do, but insists upon the preeminence of the individual as their own *kataribe*. By re-centering the atomic narrative back on the individual articulations of faith—and insisting that each man and woman have the opportunity to express their own atomic experience understood through that faith—Seirai illustrates a narrative of the bombing of Nagasaki in which Catholic faith is one of the leading factors of the meaning of atomic trauma.

A Brief History of Catholicism in Japan

On August 15th, 1549, St. Francis Xavier and three missionaries stepped onto the shores of Kyushu's southern-most shore in the domain of Satsuma. That was the first moment Christianity had set foot in Japan and it would be the start of a complicated and difficult history. During the mid-1500's, widespread corruption throughout the Buddhist clergy (*Sangha*) led to a distrust in the popular religion of the time and Japan's native Shinto faith provided no information about what happens after death, leaving many Japanese with a spiritual concern for their afterlives. In comparison, the Christian missionaries seemed inspiring and likeable, though strange in their appearance; they were humble and self-sacrificing making "a striking contrast to the usual corruption of the Buddhist priesthood of the time" (Yukawa, 1958). That is not to say, of course, that there was not ample condemnation and confusion amongst the Japanese people about this foreign faith. Francisco Xaviero Yukawa, bishop of Manilla in the 1950's, explained the situation as follows:

[T]here was a tenacious attitude among others prejudiced by the patriotic idea of indigenous deities. It caused them to take a hostile stand against the uncompromising deity of Christianity. The doctrine of 'original sin' with all its implications was repulsive to some people, particularly Confucian rationalists and Shinto optimists. Beside these doctrinal issues, semi-religious, moral and liturgical matters such as the questions of monogamy and chastity, or the feelings about sacraments, litany, music, images, decorations and other related matters had also a determining impact on the reactions of the people. (Yukawa, 1958: 375)

Many Japanese individuals found this Western religion appalling, especially considering the implication that adoption of a foreign faith might have in a nation where the emperor serves a spiritual role as well as a political one. Yet there were others, especially among the lower classes,

who were attracted to this faith which validated their struggle and promised rest and peace after their years of toil. Thus, there grew a deep cultural and social divide between those who found themselves convinced of the friars' seemingly holy intentions, and those who disagreed with their teachings or suspected them to be otherwise as corrupt and self-serving as the Buddhist monks.

In addition, Japan was in an era feudal statehood in which warring local *daimyo* battled for power and stability. This political unrest, combined with the natural difficulties of serfdom, resulted in an onerous lifestyle for the majority of the population. For the common man or woman, there was hope in the teachings of Christ, who promised a place of eternal light, rest, and peace at their end of their trying days. Francis Xavier and his missionaries also sought out *daimyo* support and were successful in several cases, leading the lords, their samurai, and their peasants to mass conversion. It was an era of surprising success that is titled in retrospect as the "Christian Century" (1549-1639) which begins with Xavier's arrival and concludes with Ieyasu's sealing of the country, which will be discussed below (Spae, 1964).

When Francis left Japan in November of 1551, he left behind Father Cosmo de Torres to continue his work and also wrote a letter to high Jesuit authorities requesting a greater number of missionaries, explaining, "the Japanese had the best religious quality among the pagans [he] had ever met in the Orient and that the missionary work in Japan would be highly fruitful though strenuous" (Yukawa, 1958, p. 375). Despite the continued opposition by the ruling Buddhist priest class, the Catholic populations continued to grow and by the year 1580, there were some 150,000 baptized Christians and flourishing Catholic hospitals, schools, "leprosariums", and colleges. The first Japanese Jesuit priest was ordained in 1601 and the first priest of the diocesan clergy was ordained in 1603 (Spae, 1964, p. 4). Three *daimyos* even sent envoys to Rome to pay

homage to the Pope, then Pope Gregory XIII, in 1585. This was the first time Japanese mission had reached Europe (Yukawa, 1958, p. 376). Franciscan missionaries joined the Jesuits in 1593 and continued to encourage conversion throughout the islands of Kyushu.

Throughout the following hundred years the Catholic population grew to an estimated 300,000 to 750,000 by 1605.ⁱⁱⁱ Dominicans and Augustinians joined the Franciscans and the Jesuits in their work. In the words of C. R. Boxer, the “total population of the empire at that time is roughly estimate at about twenty million, but it would be difficult, if not impossible, to find another highly civilized pagan country where Christianity had made such a mark, not merely in numbers but in influence.” (Boxer, 1951) Yet such burgeoning success did not go unnoticed by Toyotomi Hideyoshi, the leading *daimyo* of the nation which he successfully unified around 1568. In an incident known as “The Affair of *San Felipe*” in 1596, a sailor on a stranded merchant ship in the waters near the Tosa province had boasted to local authorities of the might and territorial expansion of Spain. When word of the threat reached Hideyoshi’s attention, he became convinced that the Jesuits and Franciscans were nothing more than pawns in Spain’s attempt at global aggrandizement. As a result, twenty-six missionaries and converts were captured and crucified, twenty of which were Japanese. (Yukawa, 1958, p. 377) These individuals would come to be known as the Nagasaki martyrs and would be beatified by the Vatican on May 7th, 1867. (Spae, 1964, p. 6)

The death of Hideyoshi in 1598 allowed for a period of calm after this first flare of conflict. Tokugawa Ieyasu moved into power after Hideyoshi’s passing and, in the interest of securing trade deals with the West, at first encouraged the missionaries and their work. Yet

ⁱⁱⁱ Dr. Joseph Spae declaims the exaggerated 700,000 figure and states there were no more mass conversions during the period of 1603 to 1614, although other scholars continue to support the higher number.

internal disagreement amongst the orders over authority of mission and clergy, combined with the conflict of Dutch and English merchants who were then politically opposed to the Portuguese and the Spanish traders who shared the same Japanese ports, led to a change in Ieyasu's opinion. In 1614, he imposed The Great Banishment, in which over four hundred missionaries, baptized *daimyo*, and laity were exiled to Macao and the Philippines. This was a key turning point for the Catholic faith in Japan, leaving hundreds of thousands of faithful without any spiritual support or infrastructure. Missionaries were smuggled in, but all were eventually caught and executed, or punished to the point of recanting their faith. (Yukawa, 1958) The Japanese Catholics found themselves utterly alone and under a fire of persecution. Yet their faith, which remained astonishingly profound, especially from a modern perspective, stood strong amidst the following years of death and torture.

In spite of these pressures, however, hundreds and thousands of Christians, mostly converts, withstood...threats, terrors, tortures, and finally died as martyrs with amazing fervor. Their faith was simple and sincere. They believed in the future destinies, *Paraiso* and *Inferno*, as taught by the Church, as if all these were tangible realities at hand. Some of them [claimed to see] in vision Holy Mary inviting them to heaven while they were hanged on the cross soon to be consumed by the surrounding flames; others lost all sense of distress or pain in the imminent prospect of reaching the heavenly realm on being beheaded; others heard voices encouraging them to bear the agony with the promise of celestial bliss. (Ibid, p. 378)

While this paper will not try to determine how, why, and precisely to what degree the Roman Catholic faith was adopted by the Nagasaki populations, the spiritual fervor demonstrated by those who underwent persecution was surprising, even by biblical standards. This seemingly unwavering devotion, tempered by long years of struggle, would serve as the foundation for the continuity of the faith into modern centuries.

In 1637, an agrarian riot of Christian laity against the egregious administration of their *daimyo* convinced Ieyasu that further suppression was necessary. In 1639, the “Closed Nation” policy was instituted, officially putting into motion a complete isolation of Japan from the rest of the world with the exception of Dutch and Chinese merchants through the sole open port at Nagasaki. Another wave of Christian persecution began, resulting in many more thousands of deaths. In order to successfully flush out the Christians, “an extensive and very efficient system of espionage was maintained by the Tokugawa shogunate. Monetary rewards were offered to denouncers, a priest rating five hundred *ryo* in 1682. City and village neighborhoods were divided into groups of five or more households (*goningumi*) and, if a Christian was discovered, all members of the group were liable to punishment.” (Spae, 1964, p. 6) Furthermore, there arose a unique test known as *efumi* in which suspected Christians were called to trample on a sacred image, typically of Christ himself or the Blessed Virgin. Post-1640, this was completed yearly, most often at Buddhist temples, and was maintained until 1853. Families were also required to register at temples each year in order to obtain a certificate. Those who apostatized were allowed to go free, although they and their descendant family members were set under a close watch: “males until the seventh generation, females until the fourth.” (Ibid, p. 7)

This institution of religion as traced through families derived from Buddhist and Shinto spiritual obligations and natural assumptions about the adoption of religious faith as a family-affair and not an individual one. This would serve as a founding aspect of the passing-on of the Catholic faith through the following decades. In the generations that followed, despite the persecutions underground Christians learned how to maintain the faith underground, particularly in those areas of Nagasaki called Urakami, Amakusa, and the villages of the Goto Islands.

Despite being completely isolated from the Western world, the *kirishitans* maintained a Church and religious lifestyle, even without the presence of ordained clergyman.

They kept at all times a Church calendar; there was an elder (*chōkata*) in charge of it, and an announcer (*kikikata*) to make it known from house to house; there was a baptizer (*mizukata*) appointed every ten years, and a catechist (*oshiekata*), who taught prayers and doctrine. All this went on in utmost secrecy, much as it is still being observed today by the crypto-Christians. They knew several prayers in a garbled but recognizable Latin; and they had a deep devotion to Mary whose statue they worshipped under the shape of the Buddhist Kannon.” (Ibid, p.13)

These structures and roles provided the support necessary for the Christian families not only to support one another through the era of intense oppression, but it also allowed them to pass on the faith to the younger generations.

Through the 1600 and 1700’s, as a result of the widespread persecution, hundreds of martyrs suffered at the hands of the shogunate. Don C. Seitz discusses in his article *The Nagasaki Martyrs* an account written by one Andres de Parra titled “A Short Account of the Great and Rigorous Martyrdom, which last year (1622) was suffered in Japan by One Hundred and Eighteen Martyrs” which was published in Madrid in 1624. The de Parra pamphlet describes instances of individuals being martyred on their own, but most often entire families were martyred. Among the numerous examples includes an account of “a holy matron among the newcomers, whose husband had been martyred on a charge of giving harbor to the Father, who asked: ‘Isabel Fernandez, where is Ignacio your son?’ And she, taking the child in her arms and lifting him up, answered, ‘Father, here is my son. I will offer him to God; he will become a martyr with me.’” (Seitz, 1927, p. 506) In another, soldiers “beheaded two children, one seven and the other ten years old, sons of other martyrs. They martyred also another Christian with all

his family, because, on a night when the holy corpses were still on the execution wall, they found him gathering and worshipping relics.” (Ibid, p. 507) And yet again: “On the 2nd of October there were at Nagasaki nine more martyrs, among them three children... One of these Christians was tortured seven days to oblige him to denounce the priests... His tormenters at last slit his back and poured molten lead into the wound. But finding him steadfast, they burned him alive with all his family.” (Ibid, p. 508) In each of these cases, martyrdom was not an individual experience, but done to mothers, fathers, and children if not simultaneously, then shortly following one another, regardless of if the guilt was truly born by everyone in a family. This sense of living and dying for a faith *as a family* and not as individuals resulted in tightly-knit home communities dependent on one another for spiritual and physical subsistence in this era of persecution. As professor Yuki Miyamoto explains, “To this day, [Urakami/Nagasaki Catholics] maintain the belief that their religious lineage has passed unbroken from their ancestors.” (Miyamoto, 2005, p. 135) While close study of the evolution of the *kirishitan* religion displays obvious developments and changes over time, the fact that the people hold firmly to their belief of the inheritance of a pure and unblemished faith tradition places great responsibility on the shoulders of the elderly to promulgate the faith to the younger generations. This continuity of the faith through family lines plays an essential role in the atomic perspectives of the characters in Seirai’s *Ground Zero* as each understands their faith through the context of their family. This has meaningful results in how individuals relate to the faith and thus how that faith informs their understanding of struggle and trauma.

It was not until 1853, over 200 years since the Christian persecution began, that American Commodore Perry’s famous “Black Ships” sailed into a Japanese port, startling a people unaware of the advances of Western modernity. The Tokugawa Shogunate, the

government of Japan, realizing that greater progress lay in establishing ties with the outside world, revoked the “Closed Nation” policy that same year. With the nation now open, missionaries returned to Japanese soil, first with the arrival of Father Girard at Edo on September 6th, 1859. The first Catholic church built in the country since the 1600’s was erected at Yokohama in 1861. Upon seeking out any remaining faithful, the missionaries “rejoiced to find in Nagasaki a number of Japanese Christians who emerged from hiding after having kept the faith alive in secrecy through centuries of severe persecution” in March 17, 1865. (Yukawa, 1958, p. 379) There was a great reunification of laity and clergy, yet there were some 30,000 “Separated Christians” (*hanare kirishitan*) who never returned to the church and, even today, live alongside Catholics, but practice the rituals and beliefs of their hidden Christian ancestors. (Spae, 1964, p. 15)

Christians continued to struggle into the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. Bans on Christianity and the banishment of Christians to outlying regions of the nation by the government continued even after the re-admittance of clergy into Japan. According to the estimates of one Bishop Petitjean, between the start of the Christian persecution under the Tokugawa shogunate in the early 1600’s until the liberation of March 14, 1873, 606 of those banished had died, 176 children had been born in exile, and a meager 1,981 inhabitants of Nagasaki returned to their homeland. (Ibid, p. 14) It was not until February of 1873 that all formal, political sanctions against Christians in Japan were completely removed.

However, Christians were not welcomed back into Japanese society; “Christianity was still under a considerable amount of pressure [into the early 1900’s] from the then prevailing nationalistic sentiment toward the Shinto Shrine, because the worship of the Shinto Shrine as a state religion was virtually made compulsory for the people. The Catholics were often attacked

by ultra-nationalists for not worshipping the Shinto Shrine. The situation became particularly worse at the outbreak of World War II.” (Ibid, p. 380) Even in a time when flourishing nationalism should have brought the diverse groups of Japan together, the *kirishitans* found themselves outside of the central social group.

When the United States dropped the atomic bomb on the city of Nagasaki on August 9th, 1945, winds blew it almost directly over the Urakami Cathedral. Although the bomb was originally intended to fall on the city of Kokura, the turbulent weather variable weather conditions disrupted their ability to drop the bomb with the accuracy desired for that geographic area, and so the American pilots decided to turn on their secondary target which did not require the same degree of accuracy: the city of Nagasaki. The blast erupted at 10:58 AM with an explosive equivalent to 21 kilotons of TNT. A radius of one mile from the drop point was immediately destroyed, with fires raging through the mostly wooden architecture of the city for the following weeks. It is estimated that between 40,000 to 75,000 people lost their lives instantaneously, while 60,000 more passed away due to injuries, resulting in an approximate total loss of 80,000. (‘Bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - 1945’, 2014) In the words of a survivor, Tatsuichiro Akizuki, “It seemed as if the earth itself emitted fire and smoke, flames that writhed up and erupted from underground. The sky was dark, the ground was scarlet, and in between hung clouds of yellowish smoke. Three kinds of color—black, yellow, and scarlet—loomed over the people, who ran like so many ants seeking to escape... It seemed like the end of the world.” (Ibid) Although the Nagasaki Catholics had experienced trauma throughout many generations, they had never experienced a tragedy as astronomic as this.

Questions erupted within the *kirishitan* communities: How could a Christian nation like the United States drop a bomb on the only major Christian city in Japan? How could God allow

something like this to occur to them, the chosen people, who had so willingly undergone centuries of persecution for their love of Christ? Was God no longer watching over them? These thoughts, questions, and fears are still present in the minds of many Nagasaki Christians and study of their atomic literature offers valuable insight into how their history shapes not only their understanding of the bombing, but how they are to understand the role of familial faith in the post-atomic future.

A Note about the Issue of Religious and Cultural Malleability

The issue of how truly “Catholic” the Japanese Catholic populations are is a widely debated and deeply politicized issue. The problem of cultural versus religious malleability and the ability of both to meld together to form something as seemingly strange and radical as Japanese Catholicism is something that is still being discussed today in academia according to Professor Kevin Doak. Doak makes this claim in his article titled *Hiroshima Rages, Nagasaki Prays* (2014) that there is an assumption in Western academic circles that “Catholicism is a Western religion and therefore that their [Japanese Catholics’] own Catholic values and experiences are not authentically part of ‘Japanese culture.’” (Ibid, p. 251) Doak goes on to argue that there are a number of Western scholars who formed the foundation of how Western academia studies Japan, including Patrick Lafcadio Hearn—a strong anti-Christian who lived during the institution of the new Meiji Constitution—who maintained that Japan was undefiled by Christian influence and thus was impervious to disaster and struggle in a manner unseen by the Christian nations of the West. (Ibid, p. 252) His reductionist claims about Japanese culture were blind to the multiculturalism that was happening even in his own geographic area and sprung from his own negative past experience with the Catholic religion rather than the reality of

the world around him. (Ibid, p. 254) It is essential to note this undercurrent of bias which often exists in the Western study of Japanese Catholicism, especially in consideration of the notable level of faith and zealousness within the history of the Nagasaki Catholics as demonstrated by their perseverance through hundreds of years of persecution.

This paper will build upon the assumption that the Nagasaki populations were in fact able to assimilate Catholicism into their native culture—though, of course, in their own unique expression of it. Nagai Takashi’s interpretation, for example, while topically anti-Vatican due to its refutation of Pope John Paul II’s insistent rejection of Nagai’s theory, displays a depth of faith which, despite being not theologically-accurate according to papal teachings, indicates a deep level of cultural belief in Catholic concepts, including God’s supreme divinity, grace, heaven, and martyrdom. The fluidness of religious perspective is essential to consider when discussing Catholic atomic literature, and this paper will take the perspective that disagreement with one or multiple aspects of the overarching belief system does not eradicate an individual’s title as belonging to a religious group.

The Work of Seirai Yuichi in Cultural Context

Seirai Yuichi (1958-) grew up in Nagasaki, steeped in its local cultural ether of which the *kirishitan* faith and its history is an integral part. His highly-acclaimed^{iv} writings discuss the themes of holiness, divinity, war, family, and death. While he is not a Catholic himself, it is clear that his experience growing up in Nagasaki makes him deeply aware of the effects of faith and the expression of Catholicism present in this particular geographic area. (Matsuda, 2017, p. 103)

^{iv} Seirai received the Bungakukai Prize for New Writers for his work *Jeronimo no jūjūka* (*Geronimo’s cross*), the Akutagawa Prize for *Seisui* (*Holy Water*), and the Itō Sei Literary Prize and the Tanizaki Jun’ichirō Prize for *Bakushin* (*Ground Zero, Nagasaki*), the book of study for this thesis.

The Catholic thought present here, though the churches and clergy are in union with the Vatican, occasionally breaks from strictly Vatican-approved theology in that, despite Pope John Paul II's rejection of Nagai's interpretation in the 1980s, strains of Nagai's theory remain present amongst the Catholic populations today, including the idea that the bomb was an instrument of God to some end.

Coupled with this awareness is Seirai's profound sense of duty towards the *hibakusha*. While he was born after the bombing, he grew up in the aftermath of its effects and witnessed first-hand how its scars remain with the people of Nagasaki. As his father, mother, and grandparents are all *hibakusha*, he grew up within the post-atomic experience of his family. He continues to volunteer and work closely with the Nagasaki War Memorial Museum. He claims to have always tried to put himself into the "interior worlds" of the bomb victims, though he states that literature of this subject cannot truly succeed at it to begin with as literature is only a representation and not the actual experience itself. (Matsuda, 2017, p. 101) In a discussion at the National Literature Review, Seirai explained that he wants to give a voice to those who survived the bomb. Yet he also humbly expresses his feeling of inadequacy at truly describing their horrific experience.

Despite his modesty and his non-*hibakusha* status, the praise his work has received through the years speaks to the quality and profound sensitivity to the *hibakusha* experience which he authors with and places his work *Ground Zero* within a category of second-generation atomic literature which deserves to be highly considered within academia. The value of Seirai's authorship in *Ground Zero*, as compared to that of Hayashi Fumiko, Nagai Takashi, or any of the other best-known Nagasaki atomic authors, is that he offers multiple outlooks of the Catholic faith and how the lens of that faith can affect one's interpretation of the nuclear bombing. He

allows for there to be a range of perspectives, illustrating characters who are each undergoing a personal Dark Night of the Soul, placing value on the spectrum that exists in literature as well as within the beliefs of the Nagasaki Catholic populations.

Being a Nagasaki native, he is also aware of the decrease the diocese of Nagasaki has been experiencing in recent decades. This awareness of the disintegration of the Nagasaki Catholic families was present even in the 1960's Catholic report on the status of the diocese:

The specific problem of milieus, such as that of the Nagasaki communities, is the preservation of faith, and this becomes more and more difficult— or rather necessitates new and unfamiliar techniques—on account of increased emigration of those Catholic to northern Kyushu and Honshu, and the influx of uncontrollable factors through travel and mass communications. Sociologically speaking, it is most doubtful whether these communities can continue to exist... As matters stand, adult conversions in the Nagasaki Archdiocese are very few, and a purposeful change of mentality seems required to turn back the coming unfavorable tide.

(Spae, 1964)

This is not the destruction of faith in atomic flames, but the slow degradation over time as Nagasaki society as a whole changes. It seems surprising that a highly-structured faith which withstood hundreds of years of persecution and an atomic bombing could begin to crumble. While certainly there are aspects of the faith perspective which do and will remain, the fact is that younger generations do not exhibit the same sense of social duty to attend mass, baptize their children, marry in the church, pay tithes, etc., and this indicates a profound change in culture. Seirai's literature, which includes several examples of men and women who fall into this category, demonstrates an awareness of this shift and contextualizes it within the broader history and experience of the Nagasaki Catholic *hibakusha*.

In sum, Seirai's cultural background and personal experience living within a *hibakusha* family and amongst many Nagasaki Catholics lends his work valuable insight into the particular cultural expression of the Nagasaki Catholic *hibakusha* populations. Despite the fact that he is not a *hibakusha* himself, the enormous praise which his works have received indicates the quality and sensitivity of his works and thus places them within a category of atomic literature which deserves further academic study.

Kugi (Nails): Atomic Crucifixion of Nagasaki Catholic Familial Identity

Seirai's first short story in *Ground Zero* is *Nails* and details the narrative of a family who lives on a plot of land that has been owned by their Catholic family for generations. For the three members of their family— a father (“Pa”), mother (“Ma”), and their adult son, whose name is never given—there is a deep sense of sacredness to the plot, which looks over the rebuilt Urakami Cathedral below. At the time of Pa's narration, their son has recently been institutionalized for his mental health after killing his young wife, Kiyomi.

When the two were first married, life seemed perfect. Pa and Ma recalled how happy the newlyweds had seemed. However, shortly after their wedding, the son became diagnosed with delusional schizophrenia. He became obsessed with the idea that Kiyomi was cheating on him and ultimately the stress that his mental state placed on their marriage resulted in her separating from him. In the backyard of the Ma and Pa's home, there is a small, two-room hut which used to be the home of O-Ryo-san, the *hibakusha* aunt of Pa, until her passing. When Pa was a child, O-Ryo-san would tell him and his cousins of “how the ancestors had hidden an image of the Virgin and Child in this cottage and how they had prayer here in secret during the years when [the Christian] religion was outlawed.” (Seirai, 2006, pp. 6–7) After the newlyweds split, the son

had moved into this building and, though he seemed to be stable—he took his medications, joined his parents for dinner, and worked a normal day job at a garden center—he had not allowed anyone inside. This had worried Ma and Pa, but they decided not to push him for fear of the repercussions their questions might have.

Their son was later moved to a wellness facility after he had murdered Kiyomi and O-Ryo-san's hut had been closed with six locks since that time. In order to raise funds for Kiyomi's family in compensation for her death and to do penance for the pain their son had caused, Ma and Pa decide to sell the house and land. To prepare for the sale, they break into their son's hideout. Not only do they discover records of the personal detectives he had hired to discover who Kiyomi was cheating on him with (despite the fact that the detectives had proved her innocence), but—to their horror—the back room had been covered from floor to ceiling with dark nails struck into the walls: “The surfaces of the walls bristled with iron nails set close together and sticking out half an inch or so. There must have been tens of thousands, or hundreds of thousands, of them. They covered the three walls and extended right to the edge of the ceiling boards.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 14) The story concludes with Ma and Pa stumbling back out into the snow, recalling the visit of Pope John Paul II many years ago, and questioning just what all of those nails could mean.

Needless to say, this first narrative is rife with symbolism from the Christian faith. Yet it is interesting that a text which is supposed to be about the atomic bomb would begin with a short story that seems to have little to do with the bombing itself. The presence of O-Ryo-san connects the story to the nuclear attack, but the bomb seems to be the backdrop to the narrative of the faith, rather than the focus. This is not without reason and establishes that while the bombing is an essential aspect of the Nagasaki people's experience, there is a deeper meaning to the event as

it figures in a long line of experience which has shaped the path of this cultural group. This is precisely the “chronology of suffering” which Treat claims is a defining aspect of Nagasaki atomic literature as the physical space of those the atomic victims is the same space which also served as a sanctum for religious practice during the years of persecution. (Treat, 1995, p. 326) This establishment of the cabin in Ma and Pa’s backyard as a place for their family to heal and have communion with one another and with God through the Blessed Virgin situates the son’s later actions there as illustrations of a disfigurement, or even a crucifixion, of that same familial faith.

At the beginning of the narrative, Pa explains how the issues with their son has resulted in social pressures which inhibit Ma from attending mass. Instead, she prays in the yard between the main house and the cottage, looking down on the cathedral from above. (Seirai, 2006, p. 1) From the start, there is a sense that this family has been severed by the larger faith group. Within the multiple levels of the church which Seirai illustrates there is the cathedral itself, Ma and Pa’s land, and the hillside itself which, years before, had “looked like a stone-built church that had gradually taken shape over the years as the pious people there had cultivated the land” (Seirai, 2006, p. 2). Each of these are physical churches, made so by the piety of those who lived in or created the spaces, symbolizes not only a sense of sanctity, but the belonging of the Nagasaki Catholic social group within those spaces as a sort of homeland. Seirai makes this attachment to the land as a sanctified object plain to the audience through Pa’s thoughts. It comes then as no surprise to hear him speak of the guilt and sadness Ma and Pa both feel at their need to sell: “to be driven out, as we had been, from a place where our ancestors had quietly yet firmly kept the faith for three hundred years brought regrets that seemed unlikely ever to heal” (Seirai, 2006, p. 2). Seirai constitutes the opening immediately within the themes of guilt and failure. At a topical

level, this is a guilt of needing to sell land which had meant so much to their persecuted ancestors, especially since the land has taken on a deep sense of the family's spirituality, yet Seirai goes even deeper:

When Pa was young, he would go and spend time with O-Ryo-san while she recuperated from the bombing, listening to the stories of their family, "Stories of distant ancestors who had gone, praying, to their deaths, burned alive at the stake; or of the narrow cages in which the faithful were imprisoned when whole families were forcefully removed to Yamaguchi in the final days of prohibition. [O-Ryo-san] told [him] of the heat of fires that seared the flesh and the frost that streaked the ground during the bitter winter of captivity, her face wrinkling with pain and sorrow as if she had lived through these events herself" (Seirai, 2006, p. 6). It is not difficult to see why O-Ryo-san could feel the pain of their ancestors so palpably; she had lived through atomic fire herself! As a *hibakusha*, she understands precisely what the "fires that seared the flesh" are. There is a sense that the sufferers of this family did not stop in the 20th century, but merely took on a new form. And while they are horrific and painful, they are also a source of inspiration, hope, and faith; the ancestors are martyrs—models of what it means to be truly faithful in the face of suffering and death, either from government persecution or nuclear blast. After detailing these horrors, it is no coincidence that O-Ryo-san then proceeds to describe, "how the ancestors had hidden an image of the Virgin and Child in this cottage and how they had prayed here in secret during the years when our religion was outlawed" (Seirai, 2006, pp. 6–7). There is perhaps no greater symbol of hope that the image of the Virgin Mary and child Jesus in the Catholic faith, as it represents God's gift of his only Son to humanity who ultimately dies for the sins of man, opening heaven to repentant Christians. It is then no surprise that the descriptions of martyrdom would be swiftly followed by the image of hope which was held

within the very cottage now in the possession of Ma and Pa. The family thus is a protector of a symbol of hope in God's love and protection, as Pa muses that he suspects "this is the reason why my grandfather left this building untouched when he had the main house rebuilt" (Seirai, 2006, p. 7). This sense of being a chosen people, a chosen family, who are part of a lineage of faithful martyrs and witnesses to the Catholic faith is key to understanding the symbolism of nails.

In 2017 at a public tribute to Hayashi Kyoko, Seirai explained that the nails are a metaphor for nuclear missiles, but also that he "wants the reader to think deeply about *Nails*" and "that the reader can read this area [of the text] freely." (Matsuda, 2017, p. 103) Understanding the nails as nuclear missiles is certainly a powerful image. One can imagine the nightmares and horrific visions that O-Ryo-san must have suffered as she recovered in the cottage. It is perhaps no surprise that that trauma might symbolically surface yet again along the family lines. The time which *Ground Zero* was written was also a period in which anti-nuclear protest was reaching its full potential both within Japan and in the Western world. The image of the tens of thousands of nails is a horrific reminder of the apocalyptic future the world may choose for itself if it is to continue along its nuclear path. Yet the image of the nails should not be divorced from its cultural context; that is, the Catholic faith and the meaning which nails have in Christian theology. This is one of the many instances where a symbol in Seirai's work has multiple meanings.

What then is the significance of the conversion of this holy grotto into a dark cave of mental illness and pain? Pa understands that there has been something hidden in the family, "What had [his son] been hiding—what was this secret that we had exposed to the light?" (Seirai, 2006, p. 16). Through all of the hardship that the Nagasaki Catholics had suffered, it is natural

that there would be some doubt in God, some questioning. Despite this natural human questioning, exteriorly the faith has been unfaltering. But perhaps, within the minds of those pious Christians there was doubt. Pa, considers this, saying, “Maybe we’re the descendants of Job, and like Job, beloved beyond all reason and therefore subject to tests and trials. But we aren’t strong like Job... and some of us, like our son, are crushed by the experience.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 9) Those nails, which mirror the nails that crucified Christ are the dark underside of the family faith: the seeds of doubt planted by the pain and suffering which went one seemingly without a reason, without God. The son is the culmination of all the hidden doubt. Pa ponders why, “Why had he put all his passion and energy into doubting rather than trusting? What had turned his love to hatred? Was he the last of our family line, which has continued unbroken for three hundred years –the one unbeliever, in whom everything came to an end, undoing all the virtue that has kept the faith alive from generation to generation?”(Seirai, 2006, p. 9). The nails in the cottage strike at the very heart of everything that is sacred and upheld by this family. In the space where a member of the family recovered from what is widely believed to be the greatest of God’s signs, even then there are seeds—or nails, in this case—of doubt. They crucified God’s son, Jesus Christ, the hope for humanity, and now the nails are crucifying the sacred space, the holy family, and the entire lineage of faith.

Pa struggles with this realization of faith tinged with doubt. When he had last gone to visit his son, the son had asked if Pa believed in God. Pa responded, “Of course I do! This family has always believed. Our ancestors gave their lives for the faith!”...[His son retorted,] ‘And you call me deluded?’” (Seirai, 2006, p. 16). Note that Pa does not provide an answer to why his *personal* faith is strong, but instead immediately states that his faith is strong because he is a part of a *family* who has believed. This is not the faith of an individual alone, but because he

feels a duty to uphold the beliefs that his ancestors died for. This profound sense of duty that the Catholic family feels is also illustrated in the description that Pa gives of Pope John Paul II's visit to Nagasaki. Together with his wife and son,

We remembered the long years of persecution of those who came before us. I was overcome by a feeling that the people standing in line to receive the pope's blessing weren't people from this day and age, but our ancestors. The thought provoked a surge of emotion in me. Whenever I say my prayers, I can feel their shadowy presence by my side. Prayer is never a solitary occupation. This was why the faithful were able to endure the trails they had. (Seirai, 2006, p. 17).

Roman Catholics understand prayer to be both a solitary and a unitive devotion. So, the fact that Pa claims that his understanding of prayer—the greatest symbol of faith, being a form of communion and unity with God—is something shared and is *never* for an individual alone, also implies that faith itself is dependent upon the existence of a group. It is a shared activity which requires the relinquishing of individuality in return for a shared sense of cohesivity and meaning. The son is not only the doubter, but he is the individual who voiced his doubts, who chooses to stand apart from the group and the one who breaks the hundreds of years old lineage. To break that line is to question the faith itself, but also the very identity of a family group. Pa senses this deeply, as his own “sense of [him]self had become thin and indistinct, like a ghost.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 12). His son's rejection of the faith calls into question the identity which Pa has based his life on, the identity of the family group.

Kevin M. Doak of Georgetown explains a shift in faith in the younger generations as with “the passing of years, Nagai's call for an atonement of sin and especially his location of redemption in the sacrifice of the unblemished Lamb has lost some of its luster among members

of more jaded, recent generations.” (Doak, 2014, p. 266) It seems that while the theme of redemptive suffering is an interesting concept which had continued to serve as cultural and artistic fodder in Japan as a whole, the practical application of it to the daily lives of the Nagasaki populations has been steadily rejected. (Doak, 2014, p. 267) This is precisely what the son exemplifies in his crucifixion of the cottage. In rejecting his spiritual cultural inheritance, he spells the end of a cultural identity. Seirai himself uses this very language at a symposium held by the National Society of Japanese Literature. In detailing “Nails,” he stated: “The son who asked his father whether he believed in God reproduces the crucifixion of Christ by driving that same ‘nail’ that struck Christ to the cross.” (Katsumata, 2011, p. 6) The son crucifies father and faith, just like the Jews handed over Christ to be crucified. It is a rejection of God, but it signifies the end of the familial line whose identity was rooted in a faith.

It is also essential to note the fact that Ma and Pa do not go by their given names, but by the titles given to them by their relation to their family members. In choosing this to adopt their familial status as their names—their complete identities—here is a clear indication that Ma and Pa view themselves not as individuals, but members of a cohesive and overarching group. Pa explains that they’d “been ‘Ma’ and ‘Pa’ to each other for what seemed like ages now,” ever since the birth of their son (Seirai, 2006, p. 12). It was in this fundamental change from husband and wife to mother and father that they took full ownership of their status as full inheritors of the family, responsible for the passing on of the family faith to their child. Thus, the fact that their son is not only mentally unwell, but an unbeliever, makes them failures in this context, further adding to their guilt. In addition, the name of their son is never mentioned; he is only ever referred to as “our son.” This is another example of how the overarching importance of the family structure takes precedence over the individual; he is “son,” a child of the family who is

the intended—and failed—recipient of the family faith. This aspect of the narrative emphasizes how deeply ingrained the perspective of familial faith and expectations of the duties of mothers and fathers towards their children. The guilt of Ma and Pa is thus twofold: failure to hold on to the holy land of their ancestors and failure to pass on the faith to the next generation.

In sum, “Nails” expounds upon the central themes which the text as a whole will cover. It is clear that while the atomic bomb will be a common thread, it is not the totality of the book’s subject. Rather, the bomb figures as an important, but additional event in a long line of struggles which the Nagasaki Catholics have endured throughout the past several hundred years. This is emphasized by indicating the characters’ identities as inseparable from their roles in the family, through the experience of the loss of sacred space, and by the crucifixion of the holy space by the family member who was intended to be the hope for the continuation of the faith. This horrifying experience strikes at the very core of Pa’s beliefs:

I took pride in the beliefs that had been passed down through the generations. But would my own faith have stood firm if I’d been threatened with being burned at the stake? I couldn’t say... Somewhere, I believed, He was listening. I clung to Him the same way our son clung to Kiyomi’s body, as helpless and insignificant as an insect. (Seirai, 2006, p. 17)

These thoughts betray a doubt that has not yet been articulated—even if it had existed—amongst the Nagasaki Catholics. There is belief, but there is also an acknowledgement of one’s human weakness that most existing Catholic Nagasaki atomic literature does not display, being wrapped up in Nagai’s glorified narrative. This illustrates a fundamental shift in the nature of the social group’s faith and identity found in the main canon of Catholic Nagasaki literature. In *Nails*, Seirai describes a crisis of faith or what Catholics would title a Dark Night of the Soul. It seems

that despite surviving a series of unimaginable difficulties, including persecution and having an atomic bomb dropped on their homeland, cracks in the faith exist. Interestingly, it comes not when they are under the attack of fire and brimstone, but rather the attack of time; the slow slipping of zealousness as the years wane on. Seirai makes this undeniably clear through the delineation of the destruction of the sacred space and the family in *Nails*.

The parallel between the loss of familial faith and the trauma of the atomic bomb is the fundamental theme of *Ground Zero* and *Nails* serves as the foundational illustration of that multi-sided issue; it describes a much larger issue of the loss of faith and the ensuing loss of religious identity of the Nagasaki Catholics in the post-atomic decades. In *Nails*, the atomic bomb, which crucifies the sacred space and the unbroken line of familial faith, is the catalyst for a loss of identity of the Catholic men and women in the purgatory of nuclear fallout.

Ishi (Stones): Escape from a Godless, Post-Atomic Existence

The second narrative, *Stones*, is the most unusual of the six stories in that it is narrated from the perspective of a forty-five-year-old man named Adam who has mental disabilities.^v Adam believes deeply in the Catholic faith which his mother has instructed him in and feels entitled to a family of his own like the other men in his faithful community (although his disability has, as of yet, made that an impossibility). This desire to do what he believes is his responsibility as a man has caused difficulties in Adam's past. The constant search for his "Eve" has resulted in being arrested on charges of stalking, as Adam struggles to understand the appropriate social etiquette for interactions with women.^{vi}

^v Adam being a fitting name for a man who looks at the world with a childlike innocence, believing wholeheartedly in what he is told.

^{vi} "I might start stalking her [Shirotani] and get arrested. I would end up all alone in a cell, pulling at my winkle and crying myself to sleep." (Seirai, 2006, p. 31)

When Adam becomes overwhelmed by another's frustration with him or by situations that he does not completely understand, he becomes a "stone": "my blood starts to feel as heavy as molasses, and my body goes stiff... My jerky heartbeat wants to stop all together. I get rigid, like I've turned to stone... Everything feels far away, like I've been catapulted into space. It's a very lonely feeling." (Seirai, 2006, p. 20) Being a stone allows Adam to cope with the fears that would otherwise be overwhelming, although the desolation that comes with it often leaves him feeling empty. In addition to being a reflection on the original status of the biblical Adam, this reaction mirrors Adam's ability to seemingly connect with those who have passed. He explains that, on "the banks of the Urakami River is a place strewn with large stones. But these are no ordinary ones. They're the remains of the people who just couldn't take it anymore. People who came in search of water when the atom bomb fell. This is where the faithful were burned at the stake. They turned to stone, and have stayed like that ever since." (Ibid, p. 27) He also sees visions of martyrs and bomb victims in his everyday life: "I watched the faithful pass by in procession, their hands bound with rope. I saw the weeping, wailing children who were burned alive when the atom bomb fell and they turned to stone. I watched them quietly out of the corner of my eye." (Ibid, p. 34) Perhaps Adam's disability allows him to understand and envision the lives of his ancestors, whose stories he has grown up hearing from his mother. Regardless of the reason for Adam's ability, the symbolism of turning to stone implies not only death, but also a willful separation from life, from self-awareness, and thus from pain. Those who turn to stone are those who have carried the heaviest of crosses. Adam sees himself as a part of this, as he is aware of his disability and the severe difficulties it causes for him.

A profound sense of pride in the Nagasaki Catholic community's "unbroken lineage of the Catholic faith that endured persecution" was dramatized by one Bishop Urakawa Wasaburō

in the aftermath of the bombing: “[w]hen the Urakami Catholics returned from their ‘journey’ (the exile from 1868 to 1873), Urakami was a wasteland with no soul. However, we rose up from the devastation...Those victims were all righteous believers.” (Miyamoto, 2005, p.139) In order to remind the hibakusha of the hardships of their ancestors, and to instill a sense of dignity and pride in their suffering, Bishop Urakawa illustrated a continuity of perseverance through the former and the present hardships of the Nagasaki Catholic populations. (Ibid, p. 139) This same pragmatic attitude is present in Adam’s understanding of his religion, the perseverance of his people, and his own place within this continuity of struggle as one who is consistently rejected for his inability to conduct himself according to social decorum.

At the time of telling, Adam is seeking contact with a childhood friend named Mr. Kutani (who he refers to as Kyu-chan), who now is a successful member of the Diet committed to anti-nuclearism. Growing up, Kutani saved Adam on numerous occasions from bullying and physical abuse from other students, including one instance where Kutani was badly beaten on behalf of his friend. Kutani is like Christ to Adam.^{vii} Adam’s mother is dying and she hopes that Kutani-san will help her make arrangements for Adam’s care after she passes. Being bedridden, Adam’s mother sends him to find Mr. Kutani at a hotel where he is staying amidst allegations that he has been unfaithful to his wife.

As Adam waits to catch a glimpse of Kutani in the lobby, he meets a beautiful young news reporter named Shirotani-san. Thinking that Adam might be her ticket to getting an audience with Kutani, she sits and talks to him. Adam becomes consumed with the fantasy of sleeping with her and making her his wife, but recalls how he was arrested for stalking a woman

^{vii} This is made explicitly clear through the use of a simile: “He really did turn the other cheek—just like the priest told him to do. Blood was pouring from his nose. He had his arms spread wide like Jesus on the Cross.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 24)

the last time he fell in love. This makes him hesitant and curse how frustrating his life is. When Mr. Kutani realizes that Adam is there, he sends down his assistant to bring Adam up to his room. Adam is overjoyed at seeing his old friend and unabashedly asks Kutani if the allegations are true. Kutani explains that they are, but how his mistress made him feel that nothing else in the world existed—his job, his family, rules, or God. He craved that feeling; he wanted to escape, to be numb, to become a stone. Of all people, Adam certainly understands this.

Finally, Adam bursts out that his mother is dying and begs Kutani to take care of him, frantically whining, “You have to take care of me... All the things God should have given to me went to you instead!” (Seirai, 2006, p. 44) In the first instance of frustration he has ever exhibited towards Adam, Kutani turns and explains that he can’t help him as he will probably be arrested in the morning—and that he doesn’t owe Adam anything. In that moment, all of Adam’s hopes for the future are dashed. He flees from the hotel and takes a taxi back towards the hospital. He pauses by a riverbank that is covered with stones which seem to him to weep and cry. He sobs,

“Maybe I’ll turn into a stone here too... Maybe I’ll become like those people by the riverside, left to weep and cry for tens, hundreds, thousands of years. Why has God abandoned them? Why doesn’t He do anything to help? Maybe God isn’t there anymore. Maybe He’s not anywhere. Maybe Heaven is empty with no one at home.

“Maybe they all knew it. My mother, the priest, even the pope in Rome. Maybe the faithful everywhere knew that Heaven was empty, but they kept praying anyway. But what would that mean? It was all too hard for a dummy like me to figure out.

“Can you hear me God? Are you out there somewhere? Don’t leave me all alone. Even if I turn to stone, I still want a family. I want a wife. I want children. I don’t want to go back to an empty house... At night, even the stones on the riverbank long to be warmed by the touch of someone’s skin.

“Please, Lord, let me have sex...” (Ibid, p. 49)

In these concluding moments, Seirai illustrates several things. Firstly, despite (and perhaps due to) Adam's disabilities, he is deeply sensitive to pain and suffering which his family line has undergone, from the years of Christian persecution up to the atomic bombing. Secondly, he demonstrates a desire to remedy the pain and loneliness that he feels, symbolized by his constant search for his "Eve" and his desire for sex. Thirdly, in the face of all of his fears, Adam speaks of a doubt in God. The combination of these three aspects form the thrust of the narrative.

The "stone" is used to illustrate an individual who has undergone such a severe level of trauma that they become utterly numb. This is not an unusual concept—it is arguably an instinct of survival to become hardened by a difficult life. Yet the fact that Adam understands this "stonehood" to extend as far back as the martyrs of the faith, to the *hibakusha* victims of the atomic bomb, and forward to himself in the present time, illustrates that same "chronology of suffering" that Treat argues is an essential element of Nagasaki literature and which is present in both the works of Nagai and Hayashi. (Treat, 1995, p. 326) Seirai taps into this foundational element of Nagasaki atomic bomb literature in a particularly clear way through Adam's insight. Furthermore, when Adam realizes that his savior, Kutani, also wants to become a stone, the Christ-like image which Adam had cherished and depended on is shattered; Kutani shows himself to be no different than any other mortal soul. With Kutani now dethroned in his worldview, Adam finds himself in an unknown universe: "I had turned to stone... It was as if I was sinking fast to the bottom of the sea or a lake. I had no one left to depend on now... What would happen to me if my mother died and I was completely on my own?" (Seirai, 2006, p. 46) Not only does this cause Adam to fear for his wellbeing on this earth, but if everything else that he had believed in has crumbled, what is to say that God and his faith are not a lie as well?

A specific note must also be made about the role which atomic bombs play in the narrative. While they are a part of the “chronology of suffering” alongside persecution and Adam’s struggles, Adam also understands that the bombs represent a level of violence that goes beyond all other forms. This is most clearly demonstrated in Adam’s remark as he waits uncomfortably for Kutani in the hotel lobby, musing to himself, “I didn’t know what to do. Maybe I’d turn into a big stone, right here in the lobby. And stay here quietly until the end of time, till the whole world was destroyed by atomic bombs.” (Ibid, p. 25) In Adam’s mind, nuclear warfare is the cause of Armageddon. This fear is likely worsened by Kutani’s relinquishment of office as Adam fears that no one will “get rid of” the atom bombs if Kutani does not. This intensifies the horrific shock he has at losing all of the structures which had formerly kept him stable, safe, and cared for. Kutani, of course, illustrates the same sentiment when he is explaining to Adam how he felt when he was with his mistress: “As long as I had her in my arms, nothing else mattered. Even if war had broken out and nuclear bombs were exploding all over the world, I probably wouldn’t have cared. I had forgotten everything—politics, faith, God.” (Ibid, p. 41) The characters in *Stones* universally understand that use of the atom bomb, if allowed to continue, would spell the end of life on earth.

It is interesting—and perhaps a bit shocking—that the last thing which Adam pleads for at the conclusion of the narrative is for God to allow him to have sex. Adam is lonely and longs for a partner who understands him. He considers this when he meets Shirotani and thinks to himself, “Had Adam finally found the piece of his rib he’d been looking for all this time? Maybe, just maybe, these forty-five years of loneliness were at an end.” (Ibid, p. 27) His childish understanding of sex is thus connected to his desire for companionship. The same loneliness which inspired God to create Eve is present, though unanswered, in Adam’s longing. (Matsuda,

2006, p. 7) Beyond this natural desire, sex is also understood by Adam as a symbol of his duty as a Christian man. He continues to fantasize about Shirotani, reflecting, “I wanted to marry her, and have sex with her, and have three children... We would go to church together as a family and eventually have grandchildren. Then, at long last, when we reached the kingdom of peace and love, we could all just give thanks and praise to God.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 29) This is particularly important when viewed in light of the larger context in which the promulgation of the Nagasaki Catholic faith is passed along blood lines. Just as in *Nails*, if Adam cannot find or maintain a marriage through which children will come into the world, the double-weight of guilt is placed upon him. Additionally, with the threat of the end of the world from nuclear destruction weighing upon him, a plea for sex through which children and new life springs symbolizes a last-ditch desire for hope that all is not lost.

In *Stones*, Adam’s particular perspective manifests a worldview deeply informed by the trauma and cultural expectations of the Nagasaki Catholic people. His deep-seated fear of nuclear weapons, whose destructive power will spell the end of the world, is combined with the fact that everyone he had formerly relied on is no longer there to support him. He seeks comfort in the idea of his missing “Eve” and the sex through which he will be able to fulfill his duty as a Catholic man. Yet at the conclusion of the narrative, he has yet to achieve that goal and is faced with the very real fear of loneliness for the rest of his life. At this, he falls into doubt about everything he has built his life on and, most poignantly, the God who was supposed to guide and preserve it. He is left as the last of his family line and will likely join the dead which he believes line the Urakami river: numb, empty stones awaiting an end to a now faithless existence.

Mushi (Insects): Casting Doubt on Familial Faith

Seirai's third short story is titled *Insects* and tells the narrative of a *hibakusha* named Michiko who struggles with unrequited love for a man named Sasaki-san. (Which she believes it is due to her disfigurement from the bombing.) Now in her seventies at the time of the story's narration, Michiko's musings and prayers to the Virgin in the late evening hours are punctuated by flashbacks from her youth—the bombing and the scenes of how she fell in love—while images of insects and their seeming condescension toward her existence flow together in a tumbling stream of memory, trauma, and emotion. Sasaki is a devout Christian who comes from a line of secret Christians. He inspires her with his faith and his moral righteousness. Despite their close friendship, he marries another woman—one who is beautiful and unblemished by the bombing—named Reiko. Despite the pain this causes Michiko, she remained friends with the couple through the years, even playing with their children as their “Nagasaki auntie.” However, an indiscretion occurred when Sasaki and Michiko were around forty years old. Sasaki was in Nagasaki for a work event and they went out to dinner together. Michiko drank too much so Sasaki walked her home. In the dark of Michiko's apartment, Sasaki initiates an act that Michiko had been longing for since the moment she saw Sasaki years ago. Despite Michiko's hesitations that “God is watching,” Sasaki responds, much to her surprise, “No he isn't... We are just like insects. Eat, mate, reproduce. Who lives, who dies? It's just luck and that's all there is to it.” (Seirai, 2006, p. 67) Towards the end of the story, Michiko composes a letter in response to Reiko after Sasaki's death. After several attempts, she decides to write about the weather, but concludes:

“P.S. Reiko: Let me tell you about another side of him [Sasaki] you never knew. You can't possibly imagine what he really was, but I know. He was an insect. A cricket that landed close to the epicenter after the bomb fell. A godless insect.

When summer comes, that area is filled with the sound of insects... These creatures hid away on Noah's Ark and have survived through all the disruption the world has seen ever since. When autumn comes, their front legs twitch together as if in prayer, and they wither and die. Maybe they also long for faith, like us.

That's what he was, Reiko—one of those insects." (Ibid, p. 77)

The final image that Seirai leaves his readers with is Michiko laying back upon her futon and falling into a dream in which she is being pulled along in a cart by her grandfather directly after the bomb. An enormous green cricket lands on her disfigured leg and laughs, asking, "Are you still alive?" as it thrusts into her and shoots its seed which feels like "a million shards of broken glass." (Ibid, p. 77)

This narrative strikes a much different tone than *Nails* and *Stones* in that it is a first person *hibakusha* narrative. There is an emphasis on the lived trauma of the bombing victim; the bomb is not something that occurred and is healed from, but something that scarred Michiko emotionally and physically, deeply influencing her everyday life. Her disfigured body is the mask of violence through which she interacts with the world, even into her elder years. This is paired with the true humanity which Michiko illustrates in her desire to be loved. At the time in her life when she should be in her prime, enjoying youth and falling in love, the trauma of the bomb is a constant barrier to her joy. This sense of injustice is at the core of Michiko's frustration and pain. It is therefore quite telling that she pairs her pain with her faith.

Michiko's faith is learned and topical. She was baptized by her grandfather directly after they found her in the rubble of the bomb, fearing that she would not survive (and therefore wouldn't go to heaven), as "That's how they used to do it in the old days" –when Christians would suffer severe torture or death at the hands of the government. (Ibid, p. 60) The ritual is

completed at her grandparents' home, "in an old house that backed onto the mountains upriver, close to the source of Urakami, an area where the faith had been kept alive for generations."

(Ibid) Michiko describes how during the baptism a "feeling of calm cam over [her]. It was as though [her] ancestors were in the room beside" her and her grandparents as they performed the sacrament. (Ibid) Her very introduction into the faith is founded upon its familial transmission.

When Michiko receives baptism, it is essential to note that she does not mention the presence of God in the room, but her ancestors. She did not come to the faith of her own accord, from some revelation of God's existence, but accepted it as a means of joining a family tradition, one that provides a sense of safety and belonging much needed after losing the rest of her immediate family and undergoing the trauma of nuclear attack. Here again it is clear that an individual's connection to the Nagasaki Catholic faith is inherently and irrevocably connected to their role in and of a family—as seen *Nails* and *Stones* as well.

Michiko's grandparents express this sense of continuity and concern over the faithful line coming to an end. Now that the Michiko is the sole survivor, the responsibility of promulgating the faith along the blood line falls to her. Yet, she'll "never have any children. No one will marry her the way she looks now. She'll be the last of the family line. And our faith will die out with her, too." (Ibid, p. 71) The future of the faith tradition looks dim. This is heartbreaking for a religious group founded upon the importance of cultural inheritance. Particularly for one in which, as Michiko's grandparents explain, the "way we believe in God hasn't changed at all. Our faith is as pure as ever. It's been handed down through generations...No matter how hard things got, even when we were persecuted, our faith kept running like a clear stream. It never stopped once. Think of that magnificent church [Urakami Cathedral] we built here." (Ibid, p. 72)

It seems that the dropping of the bomb signals not only astronomic death and destruction, but also the conclusion of a hundreds of years old faith tradition in Michiko.

Part of the Nagasaki Catholic faith is a particular devotion to Mary: the Virgin, the Blessed Mother. Throughout the narrative, Michiko talks to Mary and identifies her as “you,” implying that Mary is actually the narratee of the story. She asks Mary questions, pleads with her, and prays to her: “Tell me, Holy Mother, why was I the only one who didn’t die that day?”; “How I used to bother you, Mary—nagging away with the same questions every night in my prayers”; “Please don’t be angry with me, Holy Mother. I’m merely telling you what happened.” (Ibid, p. 53, p. 64, p. 57) This adds an interesting dimension to the text. For Michiko, the Virgin is a living presence in a way that God is not. The only time that she directly addresses God is in the first line of the formal and traditional Christian prayer: “Our Father, who art in Heaven... calm this anger in my heart! Take away the jealous thoughts that make me hate Reiko.” (Ibid, p. 54) This understanding of God as distant and unreadable is key both in that it sets the Mother as the figure of communion within the faith relationship, but also in that questions about *why* life follows the paths that it does are directed into God who is silent—the unresponsive and distant deity. In this way, Mary becomes the center of Michiko’s prayers and relationship with the divine.

Michiko is also able to connect to her ancestors through her devotion to Mary. She illustrates an understanding that she is not the first Nagasaki Catholic to reach out to the Virgin for help, asking, “Tell me, Holy Mother: Did they struggle like this against hatred and anger when they praye[d] to you in secret?” (Ibid, p. 54) Prayer to the Mother becomes a form of communion not only with the divine, but the holy blood line which forms that foundation of safety and solidity which Michiko so craves, even over fifty years after the bombing. In prayer,

Michiko can access the immunity of family: “I put my hands together and prayed. I felt the darkness wash over me—the same darkness in which our ancestors spent their lives for so many generations. It brought me a little peace of mind.” (Ibid, p. 54) Prayer as a means of connection with deceased family is essential to Michiko, considering that she is the last of her line, as prayers connects her to the idea of something greater than herself, something which provides meaning to her suffering and to her pain as it becomes united with the suffering of all those who came before her.

All of this must then be considered in light of her experience in the bomb and with Sasaki. Michiko accepts her cultural and spiritual inheritance, but it is called into question when the bomb keeps her from the one thing she truly desires: the love and attention of Sasaki. Further complicating the matter is Sasaki’s revocation of faith during their night at Michiko’s apartment. Michiko tries to give a reason as to why she survived the bombing, murmuring, “It was part of God’s plan, I think, that I was the only one to survive in my family. He must have had something in mind.” (Ibid, p. 67) Yet Sasaki responds, ‘God doesn’t spend his time watching over every little person in the world... There are too many of us... Like insects. God doesn’t keep an eye out for every insect that’s born or dies... And they don’t give a damn about him, either. What makes you think people are so different?’ (Ibid, p. 67) In this moment, Seirai illuminates a deep-seated fear that is beginning to come to the fore. Behind the smooth and pious face of Sasaki, who comes from a line of devout Christians and who even teaches the faith to young children as his profession, is a much different man—an atheist. Sasaki’s character is the symbol of the doubt that must have existed behind the unswerving devotion of those generations upon generations of believers. Doubt is natural and is arguably a key component to seeking true faith, but if it goes unacknowledged, or unaddressed, it can grow and fester, leading to a frustration with and

abandonment of a faith which seems unfounded. Sasaki is only the harbinger of this in Michiko as she contends with the unwavering faiths of her family with the claims of the man she loves and respects. Michiko struggles with how an outwardly pious man can hold such disbelief within:

What did the Bible mean to him? How was he able to pass on the message of the Gospels to the young people he taught? He seemed so empty, so unreadable! I don't think I've ever met anyone so hard to understand. Was it just a sense of duty, or respect for tradition, that made him join in their prayers day after day?" (Ibid, p. 67)

The apparent hypocrisy in Sasaki's actions clue readers into the role that tradition and duty plays in culture. Even with his heart deeply set on atheism, his continued participation in religious activities implies perhaps a desire for some form of stability. If the worldview that the existence of your family is built upon is suddenly found to be untrue, particularly with a history as traumatic as the Nagasaki Catholic people, one can feel as though they are spinning in a void, uncertain anymore of anything. Sasaki displays a human vulnerability in his continuation of religious spectacle; his actions speak more of a profoundly deep pain and disorientation than illogical hypocrisy. Michiko sums this up clearly, explaining that, "When the bomb was dropped and people rejected God, they all became insects of a sort. I, too, have lived in confusion and fear for sixty years now." (Ibid, p. 68)

The image of insects in the narrative thus has two-fold significance. Firstly, insects hold a special place in Seirai's memory: "It was surprising that during my childhood, which was only 20 years after the bombing, there were many insects near the hypocenter... The resilience of the [bugs] on the land is amazing." (Matsuda, 2017, p. 104) For Seirai, the bugs have a regenerative

meaning to them. They symbolize the continuation of life after such a great tragedy.

Fascinatingly, this is paired with a meaning quite the opposite. Biblically, insects are a symbol of God's wrath upon recalcitrant humanity. Tangentially, Seirai, through Michiko and Sasaki, illustrates that insects are a symbol of humanity without faith. Michiko pines that, "[s]ometimes I wished I could turn into a toad or a lizard or some other faithless insect." (Seirai, 2006, p. 70) Life is easier without having to answer to a God or tradition or cultural expectations. Insects are a useful image of precisely that—freedom from religious constraint, they live their lives upon the earth and reappear even after tragedy, seemingly oblivious to it. Michiko illustrates this for us in her description of what she saw upon waking up after the bombing: "All around me were the faces of people crushed in the rubble. But my first emotion wasn't exactly sadness. The human world was over, I thought, and the world of insects was about to take its place." (Ibid, p. 52) The atomic bomb changes everything. The world of a humanity dependent upon the God of an ancient faith tradition has come to an end, destroyed, and is replaced by the world of faithless insects, the world without God or faith inheritance.

This is the world which Michiko enters at the conclusion of the narrative. In her letter to Reiko she is finally exposing the truth—Sasaki's atheism—but also drawing a world-altering conclusion of her own. She muses that, "What we did was a sin, something shameful. But perhaps sin and shame don't really exist if they aren't exposed. I've always believed that God knows everything. But if—just if—He doesn't exist, then who would retain any memory of what happened between us?" (Ibid, p. 75) In this moment, she does not address the Holy Virgin, but strikes out into the unknown, following Sasaki. In this moment of doubt, she calls into question everything she, and generations of ancestors before her, have believed in her whole life.

Seirai leaves readers with this complex question—will Michiko completely lose her faith? He doesn't provide an answer but concludes with an image of Michiko dreaming of being forcibly penetrated by an insect that “shoots its seed [inside her]... like a million shards of broken glass.” (Ibid, p. 77) Michiko will likely never reach a conclusive answer, but instead finds herself floating in a purgatory of memory and trauma where images of her life coalesce into a stream of consciousness. Ikeda describes post-traumatic articulation of memory in terms outlined by van der Kolk and van der Hart: “The experience cannot be organized on a linguistic level, and this failure to arrange the memory in words and symbols leaves it to be organized on a somatosensory or iconic level: as somatic sensations, behavioral reenactments, nightmares, and flashbacks.” (Ikeda, 2014, p. 315) Life is disordered; all that can be done is attempt to create meaning in a world of contradictions. As the years wear on and the elderly review the convolutions of their lives, the pain and the suffering, it can be difficult to believe in the idyllic beliefs of the past. Faith is often strongest in the times of trial—where belief in a meaning to the suffering is an anchoring retreat—weakest in times of quiet, of relative ease, where the mind can wander and question. The post-atomic elder years is precisely that for Michiko: the quiet in which her faith is drowning.

Insects is thus the narration of Michiko's Dark Night of the Soul. As her life nears its end and the struggles of her past rise up out of the darkness, Michiko realizes that she doubts the faith which had so inspired her grandparents and her ancestors. She does not completely reject the faith at the end of the narrative, but simply acknowledges the question that, for the first time in her life, she finds herself asking: Could God, and therefore the legitimacy of the familial faith, not exist? As a result of this, the bomb which caused her disfigurement (which also contributes to the fact that Sasaki fell in love with Reiko and not with her) is the symbol of utter destruction

of Michiko's body, immediate family, and familial faith. She is the end—a reality illustrated by the “godless insect” who shoots the bitter realization of doubt inside of her—a doubt which shatters like “a million shards of broken glass” the reality and the identity which she had clung to throughout the post-atomic years of her life.

Hachimitsu (Honey): Sexual Desecration of the Sacred

The fourth of Seirai's short stories is titled *Honey* and tells the narrative of a young woman in her early thirties named Mihoko who marries into a successful family of doctors. Mihoko is a Nagasaki native, as is her husband's family, but has spent the last decade in Tokyo enjoying the fast-paced life which city culture offered her. Several years ago, her mother proposed a meeting with a suitable marriage match from the church community in Nagasaki. Mihoko agreed and decided to marry Shinji, a man who is around a decade senior to her. She agreed not because of any particular merit of his, but because of the comfortable lifestyle that such a marriage would offer her. Shinji's elderly parents are *hibakusha* and devout Nagasaki Catholics whose home and gardens are the site where several members of their family had perished in the nuclear blast. Mihoko's family are also Nagasaki Christians, but only nominally so, as their “faith is a pretty superficial thing,” though she respects the more devout customs of her in-laws. (Seirai, 2006, p. 86) Considering the high level of social isolation which the Nagasaki Catholics have engaged in as a matter of self-preservation, it is unsurprising that Mihoko and Shinji's families would seek to match their children within their own community. There is a long history of this practice, considering the implications that marriage into, within, or without a persecuted religious group could have for an individual and their family members. (Schull, 1953, pp. 80–83)

While Mihoko is “quite happy with the life [she has] here in my little Garden of Eden” she becomes “a little bored” with the ease of her lifestyle. (Ibid, p. 98) One day during her weekly trip to the swim club, she meets an old classmate named Kei who is now a housewife. Kei surprises Mihoko by divulging a secret affair she had had with a college-aged boy. This comes at the same time that Mihoko discovers Shinji’s own affair. (Rather than being upset, however, Mihoko is more impressed that an average-looking man could find another interested woman.) The combination of these two events leads her to consider what it would be like if she had an affair; she considers that she is still a young woman and deserves the kind of attention that her husband does not give her. It all seems to be perfect timing that, “just at this stage in life, along comes Kei...to whisper in my ear and tempt me to taste the forbidden fruit. It’s as if she’s disturbed a snake lying curled in some hollow inside me. Startled it and sent it slithering out of its hiding place.” (Ibid, p. 98) Mihoko’s eyes soon fall upon a high school boy who works at the local bike shop and she becomes consumed with the idea of having him for herself.

Before long, they form a flirtatious relationship. She relishes in the attention that he gives her and finds excuses to have moments alone with him at the shop. Finally, she decides—though not without a sense of guilt—that she wants to have him fully to herself. She invites him to come by her house when her husband is at work and her in-laws are at the atomic memorial service. Dually-aware of both the shame and the desire within her, Mihoko commits to the act in the middle of the family garden and the narrative ends with the gaze of the Virgin Mary statue falling upon her.

This narrative heavy-handedly uses the symbolism of The Fall in The Garden of Eden to illustrate the destruction of the family and the holy ground of their home and gardens. The plot around the house is filled with kiwi fruit and flowers with a beautiful wisteria vine trellis. The

elder father planted them in model of New Zealand and its president who “[r]efused to allow nuclear weapons into his country. And he [the president] took a leading role during the talks to ban them altogether... ‘New Zealand is like a modern Garden of Eden. Bursting with golden kiwi fruit.’” (Ibid, p. 85) The family’s garden is thus modeled on Paradise—a Paradise which, in addition to mirroring the lush biblical example is, axiomatically, free from atomic weapons. This sanctified physical space is a place of healing and triumph considering the tragedy which had occurred within in it not so many decades prior as the “bones of the family dead were found—on this very spot, sixty years ago. Both the statue and the crucifix next to it point toward where the bones were collected...It’s as if [the family has] been living here as grave keepers all these years.” (Ibid, p. 108) This reclamation of the physical space from trauma into healing and sacredness is further illustrated by the protective presence of the Virgin Mary whose “white statue...stands with her arms open wide, gazing out into the garden.” (Ibid, p. 84) This represents continuity in the form of God’s presence; the fact that the family was able to rebuild anew implies that evil did not prevail, but that God persevered through them and besides them.^{viii} On the memorial day, Shinji’s parents marvel to one another that, “I never thought sixty years ago when we stood here in the ruins that I would live to see my great-grandson’s face... I thought we were the last of the line. Do you remember what you said to comfort me? We’re not the last, you said, we’re the first.” (Ibid, p. 104) The continuity of the family line, and the faith propagated along that line, is thus visually illustrated in the flourishing garden.

At the same time, the Garden of Eden also contained the tree of knowledge and the temptation of the serpent. As Mihoko grew closer to the boy from the bike shop, she sometimes carried kiwis in the basket of her bike. The boy is fascinated by the unusual brown fruit, which

^{viii} This is the same pragmatism which Adam of *Stones* had due to the cultural pride in faithful perseverance.

“reminds [Mihoko] of the forbidden fruit—as if there’s some secret meaning to it” and she imagines “the little thing ripening and swelling in the warmth of his hands.” (Ibid, p. 81-82) It is also an unsubtle symbol of female genitalia, which further emphasizes the implication of sexual temptation that threatens to defile the consecrated land. Mihoko makes this clear when she is jolted by the parents’ mention of how the garden is an Eden: “The words ‘Garden of Eden’ bring me to my senses... Are we[she and the boy] going to be expelled from Paradise?” (Ibid, p. 85) She does not mean that she fears expulsion from the literal garden, but from the Garden created by the family and their faith—the structure and sanctity which creates meaning for the post-atomic survivors. Mihoko even goes so far as to imagine that she has a snake coiled inside of her:

There is a hollow in the trunk [of a tree in the garden] that looks a bit like the face in Munch’s painting of the scream... I was scooping it out when a large black snake suddenly emerged from deep inside, arching its dark sickle head and glaring at me with its yellow eyes... Where did the snake go after that? Sometimes I wonder if somehow it might be hiding in a hollow inside me. I mean look at me: a thirty-three-year-old married woman, proposing to take a boy just out of high school to bed. Why on earth? There must be something wrong with me—there’s no other explanation—something bad inside... Like the snake that was sleeping peacefully in the dead leaves until I prodded it and drove it out of its refuge, it seems only a matter of time before I get chased out of Paradise, too. (Ibid, p. 87)

This unquestionable use of the Old Testament narrative contextualizes the act which Mihoko intends to complete. By choosing to cheat on her husband and fall to temptation, she mirrors the choice of Eve, and symbolizes the destruction of the holiness of the family and the consecrated ground. Furthermore, Mihoko commits the act on the same day as the atomic bombing memorial which results in the conflation of the nuclear attack with sin and evil. In this way, she partakes of the same evil which contributed to the destruction of the family from religious persecution

through the generations and from nuclear attack, thereby contributing to the continual “chronology of suffering” of the Nagasaki Christians. Certainly Shinji is not free from rebuke for his own affair, but Mihoko’s decision to act on the day of the nuclear attack and within the sacred space of the family grounds, not to mention that her gender mirrors the role of Eve in the biblical narrative, links her to a history of sin and wrong that Shinji’s act does not. Mihoko admits this herself: “Look at me, standing here with no underwear on, observing the minute of silence and murmuring a prayer for the dead. It’s blasphemous...The siren and the church bell toll their rebuke.” (Ibid, p. 112)

In his collection of notes from the annual meeting of the *Minshu Bungaku* (Japanese Democratic Literature Society) Matsuda includes a claim by a member of the Society who asserts that Seirai’s use of sexuality as a symbol of life in his other works may also be applied here as an illustration of the polarity of death and life in a single moment as the atomic bomb is remembered and Mihoko engages in sex with the boy. (Matsuda, 2017, p. 7) Matsuda’s observation, however, overlooks the life-rejecting aspects of the act. The affair may bring momentary satisfaction to Mihoko or it may even bring a child into the world—which would be the most literal aspect of sexuality’s meaning as “life-giving.” However, the claim does not contextualize the act within the allegory Seirai uses to compare it to The Fall of Eve and it does not discuss the effect that this sexual act could have on the family in the broader context of the Nagasaki Catholic experience. The sexual encounter has the potential to destroy the bonds of marriage and family, bringing an end to the ‘paradise’ and garden of Eden that the household symbolizes. As an act of boredom, curiosity, and sin, by a nominally Catholic woman married into a outwardly serious and deeply faithful Catholic family, who is herself aware of the contradictions of her husband’s faithfulness to their marriage vows, Mihoko’s act of infidelity

raises complicated questions in relation to religious beliefs, human sexual desire, and the aftermath of atomic devastation.

The issue of faith amidst trauma underscores the atomic experience of the characters. Mihoko's faith, never strong to begin with, is caught between her desires and the religious rules which she feels pressured to follow. She expresses frustration at the conflict, asking, "Maybe God had already reckoned on all the sins that would be committed by all the men and women in history. Which would mean that He's always known that one day I would make a pass at the boy from the bike shop... Why is this descendant of your Eve about to commit a mortal sin without so much as a twinge of guilt?" (Seirai, 2006, p. 100) In this moment, Mihoko taps into an essential question which may arise from the faithful mind: how can sin, and the evil that arises from it, exist in a world with a benevolent God? The theological issue of free will is necessary to address this, but in the context of this story it unifies this question to the question of how the bomb could be dropped on the Nagasaki Christians. Shinji's parents struggle with this same issue and choose to believe that God simply "wasn't up there above us when it happened... It was out of His control... That's the only way I can make sense of it." (Ibid, p. 106) This is an alternative viewpoint from the perspective of Nagai, who claimed that the bomb was a gift of martyrdom from God, and Hayashi, who claimed that God does not exist. For the narrative, it illustrates the fact that the family cannot relinquish the familial faith ("The undercurrent of a family's traditions—people's ways of thinking, their intelligence, their hobbies and interests—doesn't change overnight"), but also struggles to comprehend the possible implications of such inconceivable destruction. (Ibid, p. 96) This level of faithfulness clashes with the blasphemy of Mihoko's actions and illustrates how her affair mirrors the Fall which, in this context of familial zealotry, symbolizes the end to this unbroken line of faithfulness.

The motor oil on the boy's hands implies the severity of this sin, and how its repercussions will be long-lasting and inescapable, in describing how motor oil refuses to come off his hands when they are about to engage in the act: "These stains are hell to clean off. The oil gets in right under the nails.' A strangely serious look comes over his face. For a moment, I have the absurd feeling that he might start crying." (Ibid, p. 112) A young man does not cry because his hands are dirty, but rather at the thought that, after this moment, they will never be clean again. Likewise, Mihoko and her family will forever be scarred by her choice to cheat on her husband in such a blasphemous and outrageously disrespectful manner.

As she makes the final decision to go through with her desires and to potentially leave the family and the faith behind, Mihoko sees into the house that "the interior of the space behind the screen door is just a hollow. Beyond the silhouette of Our Lady with her arms outstretched, I can see nothing." (Ibid, p. 113) Once Mihoko relinquishes her role in the family by breaking the agreement of her marriage in such a profane manner, she enters a world of darkness in which faith, illustrated here by the pure white open arms of the Blessed Mother, is rejected. Certainly Shinji is not free from rebuke for his own affair and the fact that he is born into the family faith perhaps makes his choice to cheat much worse than Mihoko's, but the context of her choice—to commit the act in the garden and on the day of the atomic memorial—links her affair to both the biblical narrative and the nuclear attack. The family and Catholic beliefs, whose faith is informed by these narratives of suffering, are desecrated by Mihoko, thereby spelling an end to the unadulterated family line and the future of this group of Nagasaki Catholics.

Kai (Shells): Seeking to Heal Intergenerational Trauma through Biblical Allusion

Seirai's fifth short story tells the narrative of a man named Takamori who sinks into delusion after the unexpected death of his four-year-old daughter, Sayaka, due to pneumonia. After Sayaka's death, he suffered from a severe panic and anxiety disorder which left him unable to continue working at his family's architectural firm. Soon after, his wife left him to live with her parents due to the strain of Takamori's mental illness. In the illusion of his mind, Takamori believes that the ocean washes over the land at night and, just recently, leaves shells scattered throughout the landscape. He finds these shells and holds them as tangible evidence that he is not losing his mind; because physically present they are "not a sign that [he is] unravelling, far from it. [They are] the firm knot that will hold [him] together." (Seirai, 2006, 117) Despite this, his family cannot see the shells and avoid the subject with him; Takamori suspects that they don't want to rouse him into episode which might result in another visit to the psychiatric hospital. Thus, he spends each day in his apartment, trying to improve his health and heal his broken heart, amidst a million small reminders of what he has lost—Sayaka's little sandals still lined up by the door, her high-chair on the porch, the scraps of festival paper with her scribbles still sitting on the table—those small memorials he is afraid to lose as she "lives on in the things she left behind." (Ibid, 121)

Yet the day that the shells appeared changes everything for Takamori. He senses that "this special day—the day the shells appeared—marks a new start." (Ibid, 122) He believes they are a symbol of the nearness of Sayaka's spirit as they remind him of how she used to collect them from the beach as if they were invaluable treasures: "That's why this cowrie is so precious—I can feel Sayaka's presence in it so clearly." (Ibid, 117) With this small sense of hope restored, Takamori has been able to sleep well for the first time in months, as if he has drawn

closer to the curative sea. Feeling well, he decides to walk to the neighborhood garbage center to drop off his house trash.

At the center, he spots the elderly, mildly abrasive neighbor named Nagai who scrupulously cares for the center. At first, Nagai ignores Takamori, but after a few minutes he asks if Takamori is the father of Sayaka. Unbeknownst to her father, Sayaka had come often during the day and helped Nagai and his sister sort the items. Nagai was enchanted with her and had been concerned when she had stopped coming months ago. After learning of her death, he falls into a deep silence and then offers to say a prayer for her as he is a practicing Christian. The two men return to Takamori's apartment so that he may offer it at their family's Buddhist funerary altar. After he prays, Nagai speaks of his regret that he could not have died in her place. He struggles to understand why a young girl like Sayaka should die when a man like himself, who has vices and has lived a long life, continues on living. He goes on to divulge that he has also recently lost his sister, Momoyo, who died unexpectedly of a brain hemorrhage. To the protagonist's disbelief and joy, the elderly man explains that his sister used to talk of how the sea would wash over the land at night like a high tide.

As the narrative of her life unfolds, Takamori learns that Momoyo was a *hibakusha* who, at the age of seven, had to drag her mother away from the burning house which held her two younger siblings and grandparents inside. Takamori thinks to himself that, "Living close to ground zero, you sometimes hear stories like this, even now... [T]hey seem like tales of long ago—legends almost as distant from the present as the persecution of the Nagasaki Christians." (Ibid, 143) Eva Hoffman, a Holocaust scholar, claims that the propagation of traumatic narratives across generations undergoes a fundamental change between first and second generation survivors: "Whereas adults who live through violence and atrocity can understand what happens

to them as actuality—no matter how awful the terms—the generation after receives its first knowledge of the terrible events with only childish instruments of perception, and as a kind of fable.” (Hoffman, 16) Takamori directly describes Hoffman’s argument in this moment and thereby indicates how the history of suffering which the Nagasaki people have endured lives on in the mythic collective history of those who live within the Nagasaki geographic area. Indeed, the social fabric is knit with the traumatic narratives of its citizens, both Christian and not. These traumatic experiences from the far and recent past live on in the conscious and unconscious of its citizens, as Nagai explains that what Momoyo, “‘went through then, escaping from the fire—it marked her forever.’” (Seirai, 2006, 144) Like so many other Nagasaki citizens, Momoyo is the bearer of both ancestral and personal traumatic narratives which deeply inform her worldview and which she unintentionally passes on to those around her. That is, throughout the rest of her life, Momoyo never directly spoke of what she experienced in the atomic bombing, with the exception of one time directly after the event.

Nagai recants the story told to them by their grandmother of how the local Christians saved villagers who had gone far out onto the sea floor when the tide had receded prior to the strike of a tsunami. In order to call them back, the Christians set fire to their own homes. Momoyo had never liked this ending, thinking that the Christians had sacrificed so much to be given so little in return. To appease her, her grandmother replied that the sea has washed over the land, dousing all of the fires. In reward for their good deed, God had sprinkled the land with beautiful shells. The story seemed to have great significance for Momoyo as, years later, shortly after the bombing, Momoyo had murmured, “‘I wish the sea would wash over it all,’ she said. ‘To put out the fires.’” (Ibid, 146) For her, the Christian narratives which spoke of the ocean as

God's cleansing of the land remained with her for the rest of her life and provided the lens through which she understood the atomic attack.

For Takamori, this could not be more surprising or validating. He realizes that “[a]ll the shells [he’d] found strewn around today have been leading [him] here—to the memory of this girl sixty years ago... [he hasn’t] been clinging to a crazy dream all this time.” (Ibid, 148) The collective narrative which had soothed a burdened Christian *hibakusha*'s mind had also somehow come to relieve the mind of Takamori. He realizes that, “the old woman [Momoyo] was the first to notice. Then, through Sayaka, her discovery was passed on to me. And the solid weight[the shell] I can feel in my pocket is the proof.” (Ibid, 134) Takamori had unknowingly learned the story from his daughter, who had in turn learned it from Momoyo. Yet this is more than just a story for these three individuals, as Nagai goes on to explain that on “August 10th, the night that Sayaka died, they both found a shell at the junction of the road, although Nagai could not see it. ‘Their reward!’” (Ibid, 150) For some reason, the passage of this narrative, this “truth” as Takamori calls it, allows Momoyo, Sayaka, and Takamori to see the shells when no one else can.

The shells represent seeds of hope visible to the innocent, open mind of children, the elderly, and the traumatized. Those who undergo trauma as severe as that of the atomic blast, the loss of a child, or religious persecution, shoulder a significant burden which is carried throughout the rest of one's life. It is impossible to wipe clean the memory of what has occurred, which is perhaps why the symbolism of the sea cleansing and renewing the land after tragedy, as in the biblical narrative of Noah and the great flood, is such an attractive story for those who have struggled with great loss. (Ibid, 149) Through a benevolent God, everything is “washed by the

sea, rubbed clean from the stains it had acquired in the human world.” (Ibid, 132) By connecting to this intergenerational narrative, all three individuals are able to seek healing and hope.

Takamori speaks of this human need to believe in something greater, of something beyond the pain and trauma of the earth. Within each man and woman, “the images of things we’ve lost are swept away on the tide inside our heads, to wash up on a distant shoreline somewhere deeper inside us. People have always been driven to imagine this other place—the other side, the world beyond, Paradise.” (Ibid, 129) Takamori claims that it is absolutely necessary to believe in truth, goodness, beauty, God, or else one risks being swept into oblivion. Without belief, “the world starts to blur like a mirage. You lose sight of God, lose friends, lose the ability to deal with other people.” (Ibid, 119-20) Although Takamori is not a religious man, he has a concept of God which is based on his ability to connect to, and have faith in, the collective past. A speaker at the National Japanese Democratic Literature Society explained that the Nagasaki Catholic faith, which is inextricably bound to atomic trauma, is transmitted to Takamori through Momoyo’s atomic experience as a flow of memories through time. (Matsuda, 8) That is, although Takamori has neither faith nor direct atomic experience, his openness to Momoyo’s narrative, which is transmitted to him through his daughter, links him to the religio-cultural group of the Nagasaki Christians.

An essential aspect of this phenomenon is that all of this occurs within the geographic landscape of the Nagasaki Christians and, likewise, within a short distance from the area of ground zero. The physical reality of trauma is present in the characters’ everyday life as they are constantly aware of the tangible space where trauma occurred. Momoyo “relived that moment thousands of times. For her, the bomb fell over and over again until the day she died.” (Seirai, 2006, 148) In the same way, the many physical reminders of Sayaka (from the possessions which

still lay around the apartment, to the many places which the two of them visited together) cause Takamori to relive her death each and every day. Present here, yet again, is the same “chronology of suffering.” In this specific case, the suffering forms a unitive connection by which individuals who underwent similar levels of deep trauma are able to remedy their pain with a collective narrative: one in which a God orders healing waters over the wasted lands and bestows glimmers of hope in the form of shells. This would not have the same significance, however, if there were not a sense of the trauma being inherently tied to the physical landscape and how an individual’s personal or family ties to that landscape link that person to the collective suffering which has occurred in that space.

At the conclusion of the narrative, Takamori is faced with his greatest fear: Nagai did not see the shells on August 10th and he does not see them now as Takamori holds them up for him to view: as Nagai, “couldn’t see anything,” he supposes that his “faith just isn’t strong enough.” (Ibid, 150) Nagai appeared as if he would be open to Takamori’s claims and yet his hopes are utterly dashed. Belief in the supernatural forces described in the collective narrative are not held by all. In consideration of Takamori’s earlier comment that it is “important to believe. I think maybe I allowed myself to forget that... Have faith and you’ll be saved,” it is important to consider the role that openness or acceptance of the collective narrative or collective belief has on an individual’s perspective. (Ibid, 149) As Nagai did not experience the same atomic trauma as his sister, nor is he struggling with the loss of a loved one to the same degree that Takamori is (in that he has not sunk into mental illness as a result of it), he does not need to believe in anything beyond rationality in order to address his pain. Understanding at once that he now exists in the world beyond (“in Paradise”) and not in the rational world with Nagai, Takamori looks around “in alarm. Stretching far beyond my held-out, empty palm is a level wasteland like

a vast expanse of mudflats and, at the edge of this quiet, unpopulated world, the white threads of the waves, silently unraveling.” (Ibid, 151) Caught between rationality and a desire to believe in the faithful, collective narrative, Takamori sinks into oblivion.

Shells thus illustrates another example of an individual in the midst of a Dark Night of the Soul. As Takamori seeks healing after the death of his daughter, Sayaka, he discovers hope in the shells which he sees scattered throughout his physical landscape and the biblical allegory of the sea cleansing the land. This collective narrative, which springs from the faith and history of the Nagasaki Catholics, came to him through his daughter from an elderly Christian *hibakusha*, Momoyo. Yet when the one man whom he believes can confirm these dream-like signs of hope cannot see the shells and thus cannot substantiate the desires of Takamori’s burdened mind, he succumbs into the black of unawareness. In the depths of loss informed and articulated by intergenerational trauma, Takamori utterly loses himself.

Tori (Birds): Acceptance of the Destruction of Identity in Atomic Birth

The final story in Seirai’s collection is titled *Birds* and narrates one frightening night in the lives of an elderly couple who live in Kazagashira or “Windy Head,” Nagasaki. The man, Ryo, was an infant *hibakusha*; he only knows that he was discovered in the wreckage of the blast and was raised by a woman who happened to discover him:

I don’t know my real name or my date of birth. More than sixty years later, I have no way of finding out who I am or where I came from. All I know is that I appeared suddenly out of that white flash of light at 11:02 A.M. on August 9, 1945. This is the day recorded in my family register under ‘Date of Birth.’” (Seirai, 2005, 153)

Ryo and his foster mother formed a close bond, particularly after her breasts began to miraculously swell with milk in October of that same year. It was after that, Ryo explains, that they truly became mother and child. While Ryo and his new mother were recovering in the days after the bombing, his foster grandmother firmly believed that fate has inextricably bound them together and that if Ryo were to die, her daughter-in-law would pass as well. Ryo muses that he has no idea why she so firmly believed in this twist of destiny, though it “seemed like a survival of some older way of thinking, some ancient faith that was revived when people were caught up in a disaster on a scale beyond human understanding.” (Ibid, 159) As Ryo moved into the later years of his life, he had yet to deeply consider the implication that the circumstances of his “birth” might have for himself and the family he never knew, although there were numerous times throughout his childhood when he felt drawn towards Urakami—for reasons he couldn’t imagine at the time. That is, until he sets about to record his experience at the urging of his friend.

Upon the evening of narration, Ryo is trying to write about his “atom bomb experience” at the insistence of a friend, Takiguchi, who spends his retirement compiling memoirs of survivor’s experiences. At first, Ryo had forgotten about Takiguchi’s request until he passed out on the toilet one day. He describes the sensation of floating towards a bright white light and he heard a voice ring out, asking, “Who are you?” His foster father had fainted and passed away in the same spot years earlier and so, as not to concern his wife, he said nothing of it to anyone. It happened one other time and again he felt himself wrapped in a blissful white light. A secret visit to the hospital and an MRI test had shown nothing of concern, but the fear of imminent death consumed him. He cannot “shake off the idea that [he’d] done nothing to solve the riddle [he] was given at the outset of [his] life—those two blank spaces on [his] family register. [His] life

seemed wasted and meaningless. [He is] filled with remorse.” (Seirai, 2006, 162) Thus, Ryo sets about to tell the narrative of his life and to “impose some kind of order on the fog of emotions that have been tormenting” him. (Ibid, 162)

As he sits down to write, he first considers his foster family. The man’s foster father was a soldier in Manchuria. He returned deeply traumatized only to find his young wife with a new baby and breasts swelling with milk; he never fully believed that she had not cheated on him, which led to a life-long strain between Ryo and his father. The couple never went on to have any more children, despite being in their twenties upon his return, and Ryo suspects that the strain of his presence in the family was the cause. His foster sister held a grudge against him as well for being the one to receive the greatest amount of attention from their mother during childhood. This tension between the siblings continued into adulthood, when the foster parents passed away and the future of the family home was in question. Ryo’s brother-in-law, who had done nothing to care for the dying parents, had insisted on selling the house only days after they had both passed. Ryo and his wife had eventually bought the house, but it had cost them everything. Since then, Ryo and his sister have had little contact.

He also thinks back to one of the formative memories of his childhood. On one occasion, when his father was having one of his furious outbursts at his mother, she fled out to a field with him in her arms. By a pond in the middle of that field stood a white egret. As they approached, Ryo, an infant, had stopped crying and the bird looked sadly on at him in the arms of his foster mother. From this experience, his mother spun a story that the egret was the spirit of his real mother who had come back to ensure that he was safe. Ryo recalls that this was a moment of healing for him and cherishes it as if it were a memory of his real mother.

Amidst all of these thoughts, the couple suddenly hears a sound “like ripping cardboard” in the night. Ryo’s wife, a formerly cheerful person who became fatigued and withdrawn after almost a decade of caring for Ryo’s dying parents, interrupts his writing with a flurry of questions and concerns. She insists that they go check the house for a burglar. Ryo assents and they search the house, but find no one. Despite this, his wife’s anxiety continues to grow. She begins to question whether everything that happens in life is just an accident, or if there is such a thing as fate: is it an accident that he was found in the nuclear wreckage? It is an accident that they were met and married? They continue to hear thumping sounds and once more they call up the stairs, “Who is it?” But again, there is no reply. They fall asleep with concern still lingering in their minds.

They wake to a bright morning and believe that all of their fears were for naught. Yet, as Ryo finishes his breakfast, he hears his wife call his name desperately from outside. He runs out to discover that a white egret, tangled in fishing line, is snagged and hanging from the gutter on the house, bleeding and torn. They cut her down and lay her gently on a blanket, but it is clear that the damage has been done and that she is dying. The bird, which Ryo caresses in his hands, fills his vision and he seems to hear a voice coming from it, ““Who is it? Who are you?” He cannot help but wonder, “[w]as this how my parents died, wounded and in pain?... How heartless, how unthinking I’d been.”” (Ibid, 179) Overcome by the shame he feels at being both ignorant of the bird’s suffering through the long, cold night and ignorant of the suffering that his birth parents must have suffered in the atomic blast, Ryo succumbs to melancholy. As the bird’s life passes before his eyes, Ryo sighs, “[a]nd like this, covered in wounds, my mother died in the bright spring sunlight.” (Ibid, 180)

This narrative is notably different from the others in that it is narrated not only by a *hibakusha*, but by a *hibakusha* who has no memories related to his experience as an atomic bomb survivor. This places Ryo in a singular position, caught between the victimhood that he has rightful claim to and the reality that the only trauma he recalls is his very ignorance about his identity. The atom bomb stripped him of his family, erasing the foundational understanding of where he came from to a blank space: “There are two blanks on my family register in the spaces where my parents’ names should go. My past disappeared in the shadow of the atomic cloud.” (Ibid, 153) He knows that he could likely have been one of the many newborns who died in the blast; he’s feels that he is someone’s ghost and that the last sixty years have been nothing but a “shallow dream.” (Ibid, 163)

Relevant to this loss is the dispossession of religious identity. As Ryo knows that he was found in the Urakami region, it is more likely than not that his family were descendants of the Nagasaki Christians. Were his family to have survived the attack, Ryo would have been another link in a long chain of faithful, like many of the other characters in Seirai’s *Ground Zero* narratives. Yet, this is not what occurs and he finds himself once more desiring to know more and yet knowing that the desire will be fruitless. Nonetheless, he finds himself returning to the area, “as if something had drawn [him] there. It always happened during moments of stress...[He] would hop on a tram and end up in Urakami before [he] realized where [he] was going.” (Ibid, 162) Ryo’s return to the geographic space of his ancestors illustrates his continued yearning, particularly in moments of vulnerability, for a home and a concrete past to seek comfort and stability from. This is further exemplified by the trip which he takes with his father to Urakami. Although intended as a time for the father to gamble, they once went to look at the newly built cathedral. Running up to the front doors, Ryo peered inside the glass doors at the

white crucifix hanging over the altar. Ryo recalls, “‘That might be your god up there,’ [his father] whispered. It was quite possible that my real parents had been Christians who used to pray in this church—but I was shocked to hear him allude to it so openly. I felt I had finally found my own Urakami.” (Ibid, 170) By seeing the God of his ancestors and the rebuilt cathedral, Ryo must have felt a sense of hopefulness. Although he knows nothing of the faith, knowing that it was likely something of great value to his ancestors places the sacred ground as a space of connection for Ryo—visible, tangible aspects of a legacy that holds the key to the truth of his identity. When Ryo recollects the story of his childhood and the hole which exists where the bomb wiped away his birth, he is “reminded of the way [he] used to feel when [he] started sleeping alone as a child: a sense of utter loneliness that made me want to cling to somebody—anybody—as hard as [he] could...” (Ibid, 176) In hunger for an understanding of his familial faith, with no one in his foster family to guide him, Ryo is utterly alone. In particular consideration of the Nagasaki Christian’s long-standing isolation from other social or cultural groups due to their history of persecution and the necessity to marry within the religion in order to fulfill the duty of producing children to carry on the faith, he could not be further removed from the stabilizing foundation; not only has he lost his family, but his family belongs to perhaps one of the most tightly-knit communities within Nagasaki, thereby exacerbating Ryo’s sense of deprivation. (Schull, 1953, p. 75)

Another aspect that is essential to consider is the role that Ryo’s adopted family home plays in the narrative. Throughout the night, as Ryo and his wife search the house for the cause of the noises, his wife remarks three times, “‘The house doesn’t want us here anymore.’” (Seirai, 2006, 157) Ryo believes that, “the place my foster father had built w[as] refusing to accept the idea of two people with no blood tie to the family moving in and taking over.” (Ibid, 173)

Furthermore, as the two step through the closed up rooms and slide back creaking doors, they are reminded of the many difficult scenes from the family's history: the room where Ryo's sister sobbed when the family disapproved of her fiancé, the veranda where Ryo caught his father teaching his young son how to play a gambling card game, the table where terrible fights had broken out over the future of the house. The old house, which symbolizes Ryo's adopted family, is filled with painful glimpses of the past. And yet Ryo had fought hard to preserve it, illustrating his desire to maintain the family line he had been adopted into. Yet as they wander its hallways, calling out "Who is it," they symbolize Ryo's lifelong search to discover who he is even within a family who had never been truly his own.

Thus, when Ryo and his wife discover the egret strung upon the gutter, there is new significance to the wife's calls of, "Hello? Who is it?" (Ibid, 173). They were not searching for an animal or a piece of the house that was rattling, but a person who was causing the noise. This reaffirms the narrative of the white egret that Ryo clings to, but also makes the pitiable death of the creature further heart-wrenching as it symbolizes not only a reenactment of Ryo's birth mother's death, but Ryo's ignorance as the cause of that death. His acknowledgement of his failure to care for her is illustrated in Ryo's simple statement: "I asked it to forgive me." (Ibid, 180)

At the conclusion, Ryo is still unable to answer the question of just who his family is or who his god is. Yet he still clings to some level of belief in supernatural forces. His wife who knows his history and his heart and becalmed in the light of day simply says, "It was fate that made this place your house." (Ibid, 181) In this statement, she affirms that nothing in Ryo's life was a mistake, from his "birth" in the atom bomb, to the woman who discovered him and the family within which he grew up, to the death of the egret on that day. By resolving the issue of

how and why, she removes the blame and the guilt which is placed upon Ryo in the event that he is solely responsible for the path of his existence. In this way, she affirms the meaning of his life and the route which it followed, illuminating that it all followed a preordained plan, and thus soothing the pains which arose from guilt over the difficulties Ryo's existence caused for his adopted family and for the white egret, his mother. The narrative concludes:

No one can say how much longer my wife and I have to live. But almost certainly, our children will never live here after we are gone. Sometime in the not-too-distance future the house will be demolished, and the land will become another vacant lot. We will be the last people to use it. After us, there will be nothing but the azaleas flowering unnoticed, with the bones of the bird lying at their roots.

Our children will never know who their god is. For them, he is dead and buried. But there's no point in wishing that any of this could change; it is something that began here more than sixty years ago.

The places on my family register where my parents' names should go are empty. Nothing is recorded there. My past as a newborn baby when the atom bomb fell lies buried in that empty white space.
(Ibid, 181-82)

Seirai resolves Ryo's story with a sense of resignation. It was simply fate that caused the events to occur as they did; whether or not there was a Christian God driving that fate is not discussed and, in the opinion of the characters, is irrelevant. Regardless, the atom bomb symbolizes the destruction of the family line and the family faith. By cutting an infant from his parents, the blast severs his connection to the history and beliefs of the Nagasaki Catholics and sends Ryo into a literal Dark Night of Soul. As he searches the dark, empty house of his adopted family, he searches also the recesses of his mind for the strains of memory which he tries to put on paper. He questions who he is and what he should think about the meaning of his life. At the light of morning, as the egret passes and Ryo considers his own waning lifetime, he accepts that he will

never have an answer to the questions that have plagued his heart, but that time pushes on and the white spaces in memory will soon fade into the past.

Conclusion

Seirai Yuichi's *Ground Zero, Nagasaki* is a compilation of six short stories which detail the lives of first and second generation *hibakusha* or those related to *hibakusha* through familial or social ties. While each narrative is singular in its characterization of the bombing and the Nagasaki Catholic faith, all of the narratives illustrate the essential role that familial connection to the faith plays in an individual's interpretation of the atomic bombing. In *Nails*, the crucifixion of the sacred family space by atomic trauma and mental illness illustrates the doubt which is beginning to show within a family of devout Nagasaki Christians, spelling an end to the unbroken line of faith. In *Stones*, a mentally handicapped man's inability to find a wife and fulfill his duty as a Catholic man, in addition to the loss of his mother and his friend whom he viewed as his own Christ-like savior, calls him to question the faith which had formerly been the foundation of his worldview. Without it, he becomes just like an atomic bomb victim, a "stone"—a numb, empty being awaiting an end to a godless existence. In *Insects*, the atomic bomb's disfigurement of a *hibakusha*'s body results in a series of unfortunate events that cause her to question her family's faith for the first time. The bomb thus is the symbol of the destruction of the family line and faith. In *Honey*, a woman's choice to engage in an affair on the day of the atomic memorial and within the sacred space of her family's home mirrors the biblical narrative of the Fall of Eve in the Garden of Eden. As she desecrates the family's faith, she symbolizes the end of this family's faithful line. In *Shells*, a father seeks to heal the pain of the loss of his young daughter through biblical allusion and connection to a collective narrative based on the history of the Nagasaki Christians. Yet when he realizes that his belief in the

narrative is not shared by those around him, he succumbs to oblivion, unable to shoulder the level of trauma shared by those who undergo severe loss, including the Christian *hibakusha*. In *Birds*, an infant *hibakusha* understands that an uncontrollable fate has determined the course of his life, including the destruction of his family line and his faith in the nuclear blast. With all traces of his past destroyed at Ground Zero, he resigns himself to ignorance and the passage of time which will inevitably sweep him away as it has his adopted and birth families.

Seirai's works in *Ground Zero* are placed clearly within the scope of Nagasaki atomic bomb literature not only due to their subject and the background of their author, but also because they coincide with Treat's argument that an awareness of a "chronology of suffering" is a foundational aspect of the genre which, additionally, serves to differentiate Nagasaki atomic literature from Hiroshima atomic literature. Seirai also explores the spectrum of perspectives about the atomic bomb between the absolutes of Nagai Takashi, who propagated an unwavering, zealous faith, and that of Kyoko Hayashi, who encouraged a profound nihilism across Catholic, Buddhist, and all other religious or ideological contexts. In this gray space between the two individuals who are perhaps the best-known Nagasaki atomic authors, Seirai examines how each individual's history shapes their perspective of what atomic warfare and the bombing of Nagasaki means within the cultural context. For some, the bomb is a symbol of evil which a benevolent God remedies in his mercy. For others, the bomb is the instrument of the destruction of their faith. However, most fall somewhere in between; they long to cling to the faith of their ancestors, but struggle to understand how a weapon as profoundly heinous as an atomic bomb can exist in the same universe which is supposed to be ruled by a God of mercy.

Seirai, unlike the other well-known Nagasaki authors, illuminates that an individual's familial connection to the faith is one of the crucial aspects which determines how one interprets

the atom bomb. Considering the intense insularity which the Nagasaki Catholics adopted as a means of survival throughout their history, it comes as little surprise that the family structure would form the vital foundation for an individual's relation to the faith itself. Thus, as time goes on, as families break apart, move away, suffer from mental illness, loss, or disabilities, or individuals struggle to find a spouse with whom to form their own family branch, a deep change in belief occurs: without the structure that the family line provides, the faith falters. When an individual suffers the dual loss or wavering of faith and the trauma that comes from living in a society deeply informed by its atomic experience, he or she finds themselves in an unknown and deeply disturbing world. This dark space, a Dark Night of the Soul, caught between belief and disbelief, is where readers discover Seirai's characters—searching for meaning, hope, and humanity in a post-atomic realm.

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