

Mary Jo Salter

## Welcome to Hiroshima

is what you first see, stepping off the train:  
a billboard brought to you in living English  
by Toshiba Electric. While a channel  
silent in the TV of the brain

projects those flickering re-runs of a cloud  
that brims its risen columnful like beer  
and, spilling over, hangs its foamy head,  
you feel a thirst for history: what year

it started to be safe to breathe the air,  
and when to drink the blood and scum afloat  
on the Ohta River. But no, the water's clear,  
they pour it for your morning cup of tea

in one of the countless sunny coffee shops  
whose plastic dioramas advertise  
mutations of cuisine behind the glass:  
a pancake sandwich; a pizza someone tops

with a maraschino cherry. Passing by  
the Peace Park's floral hypocenter (where  
how bravely, or with what mistaken cheer,  
humanity erased its own erasure),

you enter the memorial museum  
and through more glass are served, as on a dish  
of blistered grass, three mannequins. Like gloves  
a mother clips to coatsleeves, strings of flesh

hang from their fingertips; or as if tied  
to recall a duty for us, *Reverence*  
*the dead whose mourners too shall soon be dead,*  
but all commemoration's swallowed up

in questions of bad taste, how re-created  
horror mocks the grim original,  
and thinking at last *They should have left it all*  
you stop. This is the wristwatch of a child.

Jammed on the moment's impact, resolute  
to communicate some message, although mute,  
it gestures with its hands at eight-fifteen  
and eight-fifteen and eight-fifteen again

while tables of statistics on the wall  
update the news by calling on a roll  
of tape, death gummed on death, and in the case  
adjacent, an exhibit under glass

is glass itself: a shard the bomb slammed in  
a woman's arm at eight-fifteen, but some  
three decades on—as if to make it plain  
hope's only as renewable as pain,

and as if all the unsung  
debasements of the past may one day come  
rising to the surface once again—  
worked its filthy way out like a tongue.