

## Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima-Nagasaki Aftermath: Poetic Reflections in *On the Horizon*

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### Abstract:

Lois Lowry's collection of poems reflect on World War II destruction using an emotive tone. Most of her publications account to stories and novels, whereas *On the Horizon* is a compilation of an English haiku alongside other numerous poems elaborating the horrors of war through real life accounts of soldiers and common people. By also presenting glimpses of her childhood dating back to the Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima-Nagasaki wartime, poet reaffirms the aftermath of war accounting to nothing, but mostly loss. Emotive construct of poems has been presented in the following paper to highlight the anti-war tone as preserved in verses. The poems are analysed considering their usage of figurative language that aids an indulgent reader experience.

**Keywords:** World War II, Anti-war poetry, Juvenile nonfiction

### Introduction:

*On the Horizon* is an account of loss and strength endured by people in both parts of the world during World War II. Parallelism in agony of both American and Japanese nationals during the wartime is conveyed through simple verses. Despite this striking simplicity, the verses strike a chord owing to usage of emotive language for passing historical evidences in form of versatile poetry.

Lowry's texts predominantly are inspired by memory, pain, and war. *On the Horizon* too brings back many such memories which were experienced by some as historical, whereas by others as something personal. Unlike her other works, this one laments through poetry. Further below is a discussion in regards to the emotive construct that has been used for purpose of defamiliarisation of warfare which is profoundly normalised in human conscience. The poem presents a rather unpopular perspective of battles estranged from voices of aspiration and valour. The haunting of warfare presented through memoirs of common people suggests the idea of oneness by revealing how people can be same despite having no similarities in their professions, race or languages. If all victims' lives are to be collectively considered, they revolve around the same values when assessed retrospectively. Whereas for the loved ones left behind, their pain offered them no choice but to embrace reality and hold compassion for being able to forgive if not forget.

### Discussion:

Pain hits everyone with the same force and to understand this empathy plays a key role. The experiences shared by Lowry mostly show how human lives are bonded together in regards to the collective deeds of people. Considering accounts of real people whose destinies intersected due to the Pearl Harbor and Hiroshima-Nagasaki attack from a more personal viewpoint indicates the aftermath of war amounting to a great deal of loss. Loss of child can be just as painful for a Japanese mother as an American mother or for that matter most mothers across all nationalities. Death weighs everyone and everything in the same scale. As shared by Dr. Akiko Mikamo in her personal account of survival and forgiveness, "When the raid was over and the damage tallied, more than 100,000 people had died and half the city was destroyed"(4). As portrayed in the poems, wars end up destroying lives and dreams by subjecting several innocents to doom. The elegy imparts warfare's futility and void in an utmost poignant manner.

*On the Horizon's* poems foreground war futility by undertaking an emotive approach. This emotive construction remains an essential tool in preserving the anti-war tone in these poetic World War II reflections and is further discussed below:

#### 1. Imagery:

The poetry undertakes usage of imagery to unveil horrors of war being far away from the perception of most people. The language used aids stimulation of imagination to transcend the reader to the setting that goes back to a long time ago.

It was an island of rainbows.  
My mother said that color arced across the sky  
on the spring day when I was born.  
On the island of rainbows,

my bare feet slipping in sand,  
I learned to walk.

(Rainbows 5)

The use of tactile imagery instigates deep dimension to the reading experience by transcending one to the setting as viewed from the personal accounts of poet. The “bare feet slipping in sand” simulates reception of the sandy, smooth feeling while walking in the soft beach. Poet’s childhood experiences at the beach resonate with fond memories of her blossoming as a girl who eventually learned to walk on that very land. The beach that had once been a protected space symbolising the warmth and innocence of childhood, turned into a gloomy location as the planes could be spotted in the vast immeasurable sky.

Furthermore, the occurrence of phrases such as “island of rainbows” and “color arced across the sky” acts as an instrumental in promoting visual reception of the hues that must have contained the beaming sky. The capacity held within these uncomplicated words above evoke a powerful visual experience. The tactile imagery in verses paired with visual imagery generates a vivid representation of the setting. The dreamy reminiscences of rainbows, colours and soft beach sand had been replaced in the twinkling of an eye after the military aircrafts took over the sky.

In the poem “Aloha”, Lowry further pens meeting her grandmother, Nonny as she called her, and welcoming her with frangipani garlands upon arrival to Hawaii. She mentions her Nonny’s eventful journey from northern midwestern part of the United States to meet their family located miles away. Although the journey had initially begun in train, she later boarded a ship sailing towards the Hawaiian island. Gleeful memories of games with her Nonny and whirling breeze are associated with seashore denoting feelings of safety and calmness in the atmosphere.

The sea moved in a blue-green rhythm, soft against the sand.

We played there, she and I, with a small shovel,  
and laughed when the breeze caught my bonnet  
and lifted it from my blond hair.

(Lowry 7)

The above description appeals as a sound representation of the sensory experience of a hat being caught and lifted by gentle strokes of breeze that come along with sea waves. The verse promotes perception of tactile sensation with aid of figurative language throughout absence of any corresponding stimuli. “Blond hair” in above lines too instils visual experience by transcending one’s imagination to a shimmering golden beach observing a tender child with blond hair pressed underneath her dainty bonnet as she fondly played by her grandmother’s side near the abundant ocean. The text effortlessly builds an engaging experience and descriptive perception even while not being superfluously written.

## 2. Haiku

Superfluous writing can have unnecessary usage of words giving it a lengthy form. The poems of primary text articulately convey the anti-war tone whilst not succumbing to redundant construction. Moreover, this compilation of poetry evinces Lowry’s efforts at attempting new writing style that diversifies her work beyond her predominant publications, novels. In fact, an English haiku too has been presented in this compilation.

Haikus were traditionally written to express the writer’s emotional state of mind whilst focusing on their natural environment. Haikus typically do not contain rhymed sentences, and avoid lengthy patterns. Their characteristically concise structure when combined with sensory imagery promotes an emotional involvement of reader due to haikus’ potential of generating vivid pictures. This style of Japanese poetry heavily relies on literary technique of imagery to build a more appealing reading experience to encourage a descriptive imagination in mind.

With a widespread of poetry ranging from newer styles to adaptations, contemporary styled haikus made their way in field of literature. Although poets around the world later adopted this style of poetry and formed them in their native languages, many of its other structural aspects remained identical to traditional essence. Haikus when written in Japanese are based on the mora counting meters that considers mora/the unit of duration used to measure the utterances. This meter has very little to do with haiku’s syllables and particularly goes on to acknowledge morae in the verse. Contrastingly, English language haikus work around a syllable-counting meter. Not being a syllabled-time language, English language haikus should be considered rare compositions accounting to their poetic construction around syllables. Haikus are particularly popular amongst English language poets around America, Australia, and Great Britain. The Haiku Society of America and British Haiku Society are some of the societies enlisting active English haiku writers. The organisations aim on exploring Haikus and their related styles besides other literary interests such as writing and editing.

English haikus are considered the best syllabic meter in English language accounting to its characteristic of being a stress-timed language where syllables are not as prioritised as rhythm of accents. The poem remains dedicated to a conventional English haiku structure of 17 syllables measured in three sets of 5-7-5 syllables each being distributed in three lines. Lois lowry’s English haiku is further examined below in regards to its syllabic construct and imagery for evoking an emotional reader response:

White light, whirling cloud / Next a strange ghostly silence / Then startling black rain (Lowry 37)

White<sub>(1)</sub> light<sub>(2)</sub> whir<sub>(3)</sub>ling<sub>(4)</sub> cloud<sub>(5)</sub> / Next<sub>(1)</sub> a<sub>(2)</sub> strange<sub>(3)</sub> ghost<sub>(4)</sub>ly<sub>(5)</sub> si<sub>(6)</sub>lence<sub>(7)</sub> / Then<sub>(1)</sub> start<sub>(2)</sub> ling<sub>(3)</sub> black<sub>(4)</sub> rain<sub>(5)</sub>

As presented above, the English haiku follows the 5-7-5 syllabic meter. Japanese haiku on other hand generally has the 5-7-5 mora counting meter. Further below is the haiku's translation in Japanese to also briefly support the comprehension of difference in syllables and mora.

Japanese translation of "Afterward":

あとで

白い光、渦巻く雲 / 次に 奇妙で 不気味な しんと / それから 衝撃的で 黒い 雨

### Romaji (romanised text):

#### Atode

Shiroi hikari, uzumaku kumo / Tsugini kimyōde bukimina shinto / Sorekara shōgekitekide kuroi ame Shi<sub>(1)</sub> ro<sub>(2)</sub>i<sub>(3)</sub>  
Hi<sub>(4)</sub>ka<sub>(5)</sub>ri<sub>(6)</sub>, u<sub>(7)</sub>zu<sub>(8)</sub>ma<sub>(9)</sub>ku<sub>(10)</sub>ku<sub>(11)</sub>mo<sub>(12)</sub> / Tsu<sub>(1)</sub>gi<sub>(2)</sub>ni<sub>(3)</sub>kim<sub>(4)</sub>yō<sub>(6)</sub>de<sub>(7)</sub>bu<sub>(8)</sub>ki<sub>(9)</sub>mi<sub>(10)</sub>na<sub>(11)</sub>shin<sub>(12)</sub>to<sub>(13)</sub> / So<sub>(1)</sub>  
re<sub>(2)</sub>ka<sub>(3)</sub>ra<sub>(4)</sub>shō<sub>(6)</sub>ge<sub>(7)</sub>ki<sub>(8)</sub>te<sub>(9)</sub>ki<sub>(10)</sub>de<sub>(11)</sub>ku<sub>(12)</sub>ro<sub>(13)</sub>i<sub>(14)</sub>ame<sub>(16)</sub>

Translations by Vinayaki Yadav

Upon comparing the above Japanese and romaji translations with their primary English language haiku, the conflict in both English and Japanese haikus is once again reinforced. Unlike the English haiku, the Japanese translation or for that matter its romanised version does not fall under 5-7-5 syllabic meter of English haiku since it is translated to a mora-based language. Having been taken from an English haiku primarily, the translation does not fall under the 5-7-5 mora counting meter too. With the indication of number of morae in each line of the romaji translation, the difference in syllables and morae is covered. If it had been originally constructed in Japanese, it would typically take the 5-7-5 morae structure, but since Lowry's is an English Haiku using 5-7-5 syllabic meter, its translated Japanese version instantly proves the difference in a syllabic and mora counting meter.

Haikus are predominantly popular for their wide usage of imagery and this trait is evident in the short English haiku. The considered brief composition seemingly describes visuals of nuclear destruction: white light and whirling cloud followed by a bizarre, deadly silence which was then accompanied by shocking, blackish rainfall. The turmoil in air had been quietened with immediate grave silence and so, it did not feel like it was getting any better. The worse was just about to come; an acid rain. "Black rain", stands for the deadly acid rain that poured after a series of disturbing turbulence and eerie quiet in the setting. Although compactly formed, above provoking visual depiction sharply represents the ravaging Hiroshima-Nagasaki incident transporting reader to fatal visuals of an acid rain which must have been a rare sight for people as they were unfamiliar with nuclear weapons.

### 3. More on emotive tone:

Alongside potential imagery, other figurative techniques too are attuned into these simple verses. These techniques are essential to build an emotive correspondence with readers as they facilitate creative observation aided with critical analysis. Lois Lowry expresses an anti-war tone by presenting empirical evidences poetically in *On the Horizon*. By presenting real life records of people that had been lost in these bombings, the text recollects bittersweet journey of their short-lived existence. A discussion intaking this analysis continues below:

#### 3.1 Metaphoric expressions:

We played and giggled: calm, serene.  
And there behind us—slow, unseen—  
Arizona, great gray tomb,  
moved, majestic, toward her doom.

(Aloha 7)

In Aloha, third poem of the book's first part, the poet shares childhood memories from the time her grandmother visited from Winconsin to Hawaii. Those cherished moments of joy and affection by her grandmother's side at the seashore were shadowed by ruination of warfare as there appeared the Arizona ship from background. It is referred to as the "great grey tomb" signifying the enormous metallic body containing more than twelve hundred men unaware of their immediate fates that were to come. December 7<sup>th</sup> of 1941 observed countless loss of lives aboard the USS Arizona near Pearl Harbour. Many of the marines aboard were young boys with hopes and dreams; some of them as young as just 18!

The great grey tomb carried the marines down death's path on that fateful Sunday morning when it was attacked by Imperial Japanese Navy Air Service.

The narrative expresses a tone far estranged from appropriation of warfare. Unlike many other works vocalising themes of warfare and dominance, this one speaks of ground reality being far more different than the perception of power and courage popularly associated with war. The last two lines in verse express how Arizona moved with majestic beauty and exalting power towards her own death. An insight into the simple livelihoods of the martyrs imparts how they had been

born humans, before being soldiers. By walking a reader through personal accounts, the poems vocalise their humane qualities while refraining from perceiving them as just soldiers who had been trained and bred for battlefields.

The picture behind warfare and struggle of power is much bigger than the nitpicked ideas linked with it. The uneventful war led to many political and social changes in the nations for coming years. US government's control over Japanese military by changing their constitution or the recent financial aid by Japanese Government for the Maui forest fires are a few instances evincing the affinity shared between both ever since the incident. Poet further builds an emotional affinity by presenting real and personal records of departed marines from that uneventful day at the American naval base.

### 3.2 Real life accounts

The experiences of martyrs have been lyrically expressed whilst ensuring historical accuracy. These accounts propel a perception of the lost ones as individuals more than soldiers destined to warfare. Many a times people are perceived for occupations they undertake in life, and even if they are commemorated for their lifetime's contribution to society, it still does not suffice as the celebration too exists to acknowledge them for their work and not their interpersonal relations. Martyrs who remain enlisted in the archives for their role in World War II have been introduced to readers by shedding light on some lesser-known humane aspects of their lives. Some of the accounts follow below:

#### JAKE AND JOHN ANDERSON

John Anderson survived the attack.

He'd been preparing for church.

Rescued, he asked to go back.

He begged to return, to search.

He was burned and bleeding.

"My brother's still there," he said,

distraught, desperate, and pleading.

"Jake's there! I know he's not dead!"

But one would die, and one live on.

Identical twins. Jake and John.

(Lowry 13)

Jake Anderson was one of the countless soldiers who had been entombed along the USS Arizona upon being attacked by Japanese explosives. The twin brothers who stepped into this world together were not able to live long enough to depart it by each other's side. John had been assigned the task of setting up the church for Sunday's morning mass after which he headed to have his food. Very soon after the attack happened, he set out desperately trying to search for his twin brother. Lowry's poem communicates the exalting feeling of remorse felt by one brother to have lost his own in this uneventful disaster. In one of the new articles covering the gathering of Pearl Harbor Veterans in 2014, John Anderson's family was interviewed:

For years, John was hesitant to even talk about Jake, He always carried a guilt burden that he couldn't get Jake. And finally one day, I said, 'John, you never really mention Jake, why is that?' And he said. 'I always felt funny that I lived and he didn't. I always wondered why I was spared and he wasn't.' He just felt like he let himself down, and Jake down as well as the rest of the family.', shared Carolyn Anderson, late John Anderson's wife. About 75 years past the ruination of 1941, John Anderson was finally reunited with his late brother in death as his cremains were interred in the wreckage of the vessel. (Schmidt)

Another poem "The Band" discusses the Arizona Navy Band Unit 22 and its musicians. Just a few moments before they were about to begin their customary instrumental performance for flag raising, they had been immediately notified to run to the battle station to pass ammunitions to the shooters. Amidst this, the black powder blew up taking lives of all twenty-one boys. The poem concludes,

All the high-stepping boys

who'd marched at high school

football games, once; who'd enlisted;

now, with their instruments, lay twisted

(Lowry 17)

A momentary glimpse into their lives stands a reminder that the boys who lost their lives in war were not very different from those who had never faced battles. They were just as human as any other boys their age. Their frail bodies made of blood and flesh had not been invincible. They grew up performing march-past and playing football like most other children their age.

Some of the musicians are mentioned in the poem that follows the above one. Neal Jason Radford, Nadel Alexander Joseph, Haas Curtis Joseph, and William Moore McCary known as “Billy” were some of the many talented musicians aboard during the surprise Japanese attack. Although merely twenty years of age, Alexander’s talent had won him education at a prestigious school of music in New York. Curtis too is remembered for his charm. He played many instruments and was the only child of his parents! All these talented, young musicians were the pride and joy of their families. The poem winds up recalling simplicity of their normal lives back home where they had been committed to being someone’s friend, guardian, lover, and son:

Back home each one had friends they missed,  
dogs they’d raised, and girls they’d kissed;  
childhood rooms with model planes,  
boyhood bikes with rusted chains;  
moms and dads and baseball teams,  
and dreams—each one of them had dreams.

(Lowry 19)

Poet’s firsthand experiences alongside stories of individuals who had encountered the warfare indicates the unintentional affinity stemmed from the massacre. Resulting from an uneventful destruction, the affinity as reflected in poems voices for empathy and compassion by stressing on the intersecting of people’s lives. The narrative implies that no one life is more precious than another. All humans and their life accounts are valued the same as perceived from the horrifying aftermath. Hence, compassion remains an important key in identifying this sameness as testified by the converging lives of war victims. The events encountered by individuals from both boundaries are put forth evincing the connection in their lives:

#### **THE RED TRICYCLE**

Soon four years old! A big boy!  
Shinichi Tetsutani  
played that morning,  
riding his red tricycle.

When his parents found him,  
he was still gripping the  
handlebar. He was so proud  
of his red tricycle.

Shin-chan, they called him.  
They buried him in the garden,  
and with him, they buried  
his red tricycle.

He had called it his friend.  
Tomodachi.

(Lowry 41)

Shinichi Tetsuani, three years of age, had been found lying dead holding his new red tricycle, his *Tomodachi* (“friend” in Japanese) with a mighty grip. On the contrary, the poet was surprised by her father upon her first family visit to their Tokyo home post war. It was a green bicycle she had been gifted; same lives, different fates.

The simple yet stimulating language provokes an image of Shinichi’s body that refused to loosen hold over the tricycle even as the soul had parted away. Although bombing reduced his body to numbness and damage, the innocence persisted unscathed. The tricycle was dug forty years later from garden as his parents finally found the courage to hold his bones and carry them to their ancestral graveyard.

They had buried it with him,  
the red tricycle  
that he called his friend.  
And forty years passed.  
He was three.  
Now he would be a man.

(Lowry 46)

Lowry's words pierce sharper upon being presented with the possibility of what it would have been like if he were alive; the possibility of little Shinichi to have had a chance at life. Had he lived, Shinichi would be a forty-three years old man who would know the taste of life's sweetness.

A different poem commemorates Frank Cabiness, private first-class officer at USS Arizona who had attempted to escape the devastation. Half of his ship destroyed, he slid about eighty feet down the ropes and bore friction burns on his palms. Frank's children have till date preserved his watch from 1941; it had stopped ticking at 8:15. Across another horizon, four years down the line in Japan, Shinji Mikamo returned back home searching for his father after completing two months of hospitalisation due to the bombing. He was never able to find his father in the ruins and shackles of his house, but only his watch that had stopped at 8:15. (Lowry 24,47)

Lowry also shares the coincidence of running into Koichi Seii once again in 1994 at the United States. After discovering that they had once met in childhood, he recalled noticing her across the playground in Shibuya, Japan while she rode her green bike as a child. Their paths never crossed until she met him again, now Allen Say, an illustrator in States. Koichi Seii had fled southern Japan with his family and moved to the States, where he renamed himself as Allen. (On the Horizon 71)

### Conclusion

*On the Horizon* voices the suffering of Pearl Harbour and Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombing. The incident changed thousands of lives while creating an immeasurable amount of damage to humanity. Countless innocent dreams and hopes were wiped out with the explosion that till date remains one of the most destructively impactful attacks. Lois Lowry puts together accounts of the victims who had been confronted by this destruction. Their accounts are presented in forms of uncomplicated poetry that bases on emotive language paired with simple constructions. The compilation uses commanding imagery and other writing techniques building an emotional receptivity with a reader. The literary techniques and simplistic construction support the poet's message against the bloodshed caused by wars.

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