

PRAISE FOR FACTORY GIRLS

A person can learn not only a lot, but *everything*, about the world—about the unplumbed shadows and fate and salvation of the world—by living beside and *inside* the movements and metamorphoses—the spinning—of those most vulnerable to being forcibly lost within it. I learn a lot—I learn *everything*—by listening, for example, to Takako Arai. Her poetry, through these brilliant translations, is, in fact, the kind of altar-as-homage-as-storytelling I need, especially now and always: that of the acute and deeply compassionate choreography of counting and recounting (sometimes into dancing) the dead.

—Brandon Shimoda

Ghosts, people, factories, and creatures blow through each other like smoke rings in Takako Arai's startling poems. Her images are so vivid and vermicular, they all but crawl under the reader's skin. Again and again, Arai shuffles present, past and future into a borderless time where dreamlife and factory work (which smells of "machine oil, hair oil, and breast milk") merge into a mythic quotidian, and every event, with its understated political implications, "spins on and on to the end of time." Arai siphons language from every kind of diction and lights it on fire. This is a book no one forgets.

—Forrest Gander

FACTORY GIRLS

Selected Poems of
Takako Arai

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Factory Girls

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You Nakai, and Sawako Nakayasu

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IN THE FACTORY

WHEN THE MOON RISES

It is the night shift in an abandoned spinning factory
There is only a single light bulb here
The spools of thread turn by themselves
Click goes the bobbins
Changed by the machines
A decade has already gone by
Since this place shut down
But when the moon rises, it begins to work
Its strange automation
They say that soon after the war
A factory worker's hair got tangled
In the machines, killing her
There are things that float here
But this is not the work of ghosts
No
In the factory
There are peculiar habits
That is what I mean
Peculiar habits remain here
An old lady who spun thread
For forty-four years here
Still licks her index finger and twists
Even on her deathbed
She cannot escape the gesture
That must be true in the netherworld too
Since threads are so infinitely thin
Gestures sink into the bodies
Of those who manipulate the machines
And possess them
Look
How the raw silk thread
Is pulled smoothly
From the factory woman's fingers
Then dances endlessly
The factory is that way too
The axle of the spinning wheel
Remembers

The molecules of steel
Hang their heads in the
Direction in which they spin
Then get caught up
Clanging empty
When the moonlight pours in
It is not just the tide that grows full

Empty
 Empty
The spinning wheels spin
The threads swim
Through the abandoned factory

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