

2

SUSTAINABLE JAPAN

One way in which Japanese authors presented a vision for Japan's recovery was to portray a Japan that stepped down from its position as a global economic and technological superpower to embrace a more traditional relationship with nature, in line with the 'slow growth' movement proposed by intellectuals such as Mikuriya Takashi and Karatani Kōjin. While the movement has not gained mainstream support in Japan, literary texts that present this kind of vision for Japan's future have been some of the most popular responses to the disaster. This chapter focuses on three such texts: *Shi no tsubute* [Pebbles of Poetry] by Wagō Ryōichi (2011), *Kamisama 2011* [God Bless You, 2011] by Kawakami Hiromi (2011) and *Ano hi kara no manga* [Manga Since that Day] by Shiriagari Kotobuki (2011).¹ Rather than simply repeating mainstream ideas from non-literary discourse (such as those from the previous chapter) in a different format, these works either add new dimensions to the debate on Japan's post-3.11 future or convey these ideas in a more accessible way that takes advantage of the power of fiction.

The idea of using disasters as a catalyst for the rethinking of human behaviour dates back to the premodern period prior to 1600 CE, when most Japanese believed that 'natural disasters were the result of imbalances in the five elements of nature caused by social impurities directly linked to human behaviour' (Weisenfeld, 2011, p. 14) and that an underground catfish (*namazu*) acted as a divine messenger, shaking the land on its back

1 Another example is Takahashi Mutsuo's poetry, which is explored extensively in Angles (2017), which also examines *Shi no tsubute*.

when it was angered (p. 25). This belief was prevalent in Japan as recently as the early 1920s, when many literary intellectuals referred to the 1923 Great Kantō Earthquake as a form of ‘divine retribution’.

What is particularly interesting in the 3.11 case is that, although the Tōhoku region bore the brunt of the damage in the case of 3.11, it was the materialism and modernity of the country that was blamed for this ‘divine retribution’. However, this was not the case in the aftermath of the 1995 Hanshin earthquake, when it was the opportunism, materialism and capitalistic tendencies of the disaster-hit Hanshinkan region that was blamed. In particular, this moral wake-up call of the triple disaster is addressed to those who had forgotten their traditional Japanese values and were living a comfortable life in Tokyo at the expense of the innocent disaster victims (the nuclear power plants in Fukushima supplied electricity to Tokyo). Although few today would believe in the existence of a divine catfish, the literary responses analysed in this chapter reveal a continuing desire of the Japanese to seek a moral lesson as a way of coming to terms with disasters.

Alternative Visions of *Kizuna* by Wagō Ryōichi and Kawakami Hiromi

Shi no tsubute by Wagō Ryōichi (2011a) and *Kamisama 2011* by Kawakami Hiromi (2011) are two very early literary responses to the disaster. These two works, albeit very different in genre and style, share an exploration and questioning of the concept of *kizuna* [bonds] that was popularised following 3.11, using traditional Japanese values. Chapter 1 outlined some of the weaknesses of the concept of *kizuna*, as argued by Japanese public intellectuals and authors. Although they did not deny the importance of helping each other in the aftermath of the disaster, the authors examined in this chapter contend that what Japan may need the most to move forward is a different vision of *kizuna*—one that encourages bonds with nature and future generations. Wagō Ryōichi and Kawakami Hiromi are two authors who, by using their writing to offer alternative views of *kizuna* and of 3.11, found strong support among those who were dissatisfied with the official representations of the disaster and sought an alternative.

Wagō Ryōichi is a poet from Fukushima who grew up in the prefecture and now works as a Japanese teacher at a local high school, which complements his career in contemporary poetry. Wagō already had an established career as a poet prior to 3.11, having received the Chūya Nakahara prize for his debut poetry collection, *AFTER* (1998), and the 47th Bansui Prize for his fourth poetry collection, *Chikyū Zunō Shibun* [Earth brain psalms] (2006). Himself a victim of the earthquake, Wagō decided to remain in Fukushima and to continue transmitting his first-hand views to the rest of Japan through his poetry. He most notably achieved this through his use of Twitter—a tool that allowed him to keep publishing his words in a time of emergency, when he did not even have a landline phone connection (Wagō & Kamata, 2011, p. 59). Wagō conducted numerous impromptu poetry sessions on Twitter for a real-time audience using the handle @wago2828.² These works have now been published in book format in the trilogy *Shi no tsubute* [Pebbles of poetry], *Shi no mokurei* [Silent prayer of poetry] and *Shi no kaikō* [Encounters with poetry].³

Remaining in deserted Fukushima after sending his family off to Yamagata, Wagō was under no illusion that *kizuna* between Japanese citizens was magically strengthened as a result of the earthquake. He reminisces that, at the time, he felt a profound sense of loneliness sitting alone in his room with the realisation that society does not necessarily protect all its members (Wagō, 2011c, p. 130). One of Wagō's central themes at the start of *Shi no tsubute* is precisely the lack of cooperation and understanding between Tōhoku and Tokyo, or the rest of Japan. Wagō (2011a) started tweeting on 16 March 2011, just five days after the earthquake and some of his first words express this concern:

I hear that no supplies have reached Minami Sōma, the city where
I used to live. They say that's because no one wants to go into the
city. Please save Minami Sōma (p. 11).⁴

He also observed that people in Fukushima were 'taught to wash their hair, hands and face after going outdoors' (Wagō, 2011a, p. 11) as a way of reducing radiation exposure, despite the serious lack of water in

2 Thanks to the ideographic writing system, it is possible to say a lot more in a tweet (which has a 140-character limit) in Japanese than in English.

3 For more information about *Shi no tsubute* and an excerpt translated by Jeffrey Angles, see Wagō (2011b). For an in-depth analysis of Wagō's use of Twitter, see Odagiri (2014).

4 Translated by Jeffrey Angles. All further translations from *Shi no tsubute* are my own and the page numbers are from the print version.

Fukushima at the time. There is silent anger in his words: ‘We do not have the water to do so’ (Wagō, 2011a, p. 11).⁵ This railing against injustice is intensified by the fact that the electricity generated in Fukushima has supplied Tokyo for many decades.

However, Wagō’s criticism and initial anger seem to become increasingly tempered as time goes by. He began to appreciate the bonds he forms with the ever-growing number of his followers on Twitter (of which there were only a dozen to begin with). He even mentions the word *kizuna* to refer to his 10-day bond with his readers in a tweet on 25 March (p. 129). At this stage, Wagō seems to feel that, despite the lack of government support and differences in attitude between Tōhoku and the rest of Japan, there was a certain *kizuna* that still existed in the country at the grassroots level. He was encouraged by the feedback from his readers, which helped him ‘find himself’ again and calm down the angry tone of his writing (Wagō & Kamata, 2011, p. 60).

Through this renewed understanding of the positive powers of *kizuna*, Wagō proceeds to outline his own vision for Japan’s future, which contains two elements: *kizuna* between humans and nature and *kizuna* between the current and future generations of Japanese people. The *kizuna* between humans and nature is evoked by the animal metaphors that occur throughout the work. Wagō (2011a) used the vibrations created by galloping horses as a metaphor for the earthquake and described those affected by the disaster as ‘sad riders’ (p. 22). His choice of the horse is symbolic because Minami-sōma hosts the famous Soma Wild Horse Chase (Sōma-Nomaio Festival).⁶ Many horses in the region were abandoned after 3.11 and were trapped without food or water. Therefore, horses symbolise the innocent sacrifice of the Tōhoku people. Further, horses are represented as divine figures that are ‘trying to ascend to the sky’ (p. 106). In the Tōhoku region, the horse-god *oshira-sama* is revered as a guardian of the home. The horses in the text are described as angry and in despair (p. 68), which may be a reference to the horses having turned into a kind of vindictive god (*tatarigami*), due to our selfish exploitation

5 The tone of the Japanese is difficult to capture in English. The original sentence is: 私たちには、それを洗う水などないのです。

6 Furukawa Hideo (2011), who wrote *Umatachi yo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* [Horses, horses, in the end the light remains pure: a tale that begins with Fukushima] in July 2011, also uses horses as a way of defamiliarising the disaster. Furukawa does this by relating Japanese history through the eyes of these horses in the disaster-hit areas and showing how, by abandoning these horses, the Japanese people severed a long lineage of these animals who played a crucial role in the formation of their country.

of nature and nuclear power. Wagō initially adopts a confrontational tone towards the horses: ‘When I start writing, an aftershock. Fine, I’ll just write on your back’ he writes on 19 March 2011 (p. 48). Eventually, Wagō politely asks for forgiveness from the horses and says that he is willing to be alone in Fukushima if need be, as though offering himself as a human sacrifice to appease the angry animals.

The other animal that appears frequently in the work is the cat, which he uses as a metaphor for nuclear energy:

Humans felt safe, having domesticated the uncontrollable cats.
They loved their best friends, embracing their fluffy safety myth.
Every human being on Earth entrusted their obedient slaves with
their body and soul. Many billions of cats. Hairs standing on end.
Hostility. Revealed (p. 141).

These cats are also metaphors for the radioactive particles that have been ‘set free’ by the nuclear meltdowns and are now roaming around Fukushima (p. 141). As with the horse metaphor, Wagō implies that humans are at fault for causing this ‘cat revolt’. Humans cuddle up to the cats when they need them and then ‘abandon them with scorn when things go bad’ (p. 213). Wagō seems to imply that all these ‘animals’ can be tamed, but to do so, a trusting relationship must be maintained between the two parties (p. 208). Whether horse riders or cat owners, Wagō asks his fellow human beings to ‘stroke the mane of the horses, tied up in the darkness’ (p. 227). This can be interpreted as a call for the Japanese to return to the respectful relationship with nature that they had in pre-industrial times—a form of *kizuna* that seems to have been entirely left out in post-3.11 discourse, which was centred on bonds between humans. Wagō’s animal metaphors subvert the official discourse of *kizuna* by bringing to mind the bonds between humans and nature that were neglected before and after 3.11.

Wagō also places emphasis on the *kizuna* that he feels between himself and future generations of Japanese people. He suggests that we view the current generation as a *renketsuten* (link) in history rather than as an endpoint (p. 49), which implies a responsibility for providing the best circumstances possible for future generations. Further, he believes that the way to achieve this kind of *kizuna* is through the power of words (p. 210). To connect with these future generations, Wagō explores new means of expression through his poetry. Wagō usually writes in abstract contemporary verse, but the language used in his Twitter poetry is plain

and unadorned. Wagō claims that, pre-3.11, he had been against the idea of poetry being written horizontally, using a word processor and that he had never used direct expressions such as ‘sadness’, ‘dream’ or ‘life’ in his poetry. In this sense, *Shi no tsubute* represents a 180-degree turn in his stance towards poetry (Wagō, 2011d, p. 247). In a public talk with Azuma Hiroki on 28 May 2011, Wagō said he felt as though he needed words that could be delivered immediately and directly to his readers to represent the disaster in real time, like a documentary (Wagō & Azuma, 2011, p. 187).⁷ He also acknowledged that this involved the use of language that was more informative than literary. In Wagō’s own words, ‘the metaphor has died’ in the face of the sheer scale and immediacy of the disaster (p. 64). Wagō’s goal in his post-3.11 writing has been to engage with reality more directly than his traditional poetry (p. 187) and to engage with a wider readership. As the myth that nuclear power is absolutely safe (*zettai anzen shinwa*) came crumbling down, Wagō also found himself abandoning his ‘absolute rules’ and challenging the limits of poetry (Fukuma & Wagō, 2011, p. 18) to rebuild his poetry from the debris, pebble by pebble.

Wagō’s work ends with a verbal duel with a devil, who tells him that his words are powerless and that they cannot bring about any physical change or bring back the dead. However, Wagō uses his poetry to fight and insists that he will keep writing and thinking about the disaster. He imagines himself being on a boat, paddling towards his goal of ‘living this new poetry’ (p. 261). Wagō continues to live his poetry by publishing it on Twitter and making his voice heard and thereby opens up possibilities for bringing his words closer to reality. By living his poetry, Wagō also believes he helps the souls of the dead to live on. The book version ends with his afterword, in which he finds a single walnut from the dead tree in his room, which he calls his ‘pebble of poetry’ (p. 263). Through his poetry, Wagō is reminded of his *kizuna* with his deceased grandmother, whose voice reminds his angry childhood self to be kind to others. His poetry creates *kizuna* where it is otherwise difficult to create, with the deceased and with the yet-to-be-born, in the ineffable devastation of the tsunami and fears of invisible radiation. Wagō acts as an example for post-3.11 Japan to explore ways of imaginatively using language, without being overly

7 The video version of this talk is available at: ‘Nico nama shisō chizu 01 Wagō Ryōichi × Azuma Hiroki’ [Niconico live thought map 01 Wagō Ryōichi and Azuma Hiroki] (30 May 2011), *Niconico*. Available from: www.nicovideo.jp/watch/sm14599601.

concerned with the various rules and conventions of communications. This creative use of language facilitates a rekindling of connections to nature and the creation of *kizuna* with past and future generations.

Kamisama 2011 by Kawakami Hiromi (2011) also builds on the mainstream notion of Japanese *kizuna* by exploring the ideas of *kizuna* between humans and nature and between generations. Kawakami Hiromi is an Akutagawa prize-winning novelist, known for her signature style of mixing fantasy and reality in her writing. Kawakami's *Kamisama 2011* [God Bless You, 2011], is a rewriting of *Kamisama* (1994)—her first published literary work. Short and like a fairy tale in its composition, *Kamisama* is a story about *watashi* (I), who is assumed to be a young woman, who goes on a walk with a friendly talking bear.⁸ The 2011 version has the same plot as the original, except for the fact that the events take place in a world post-3.11, probably near the Fukushima power plant, where one has to measure one's own radiation exposure every day and where there are no longer any children. The disaster of 3.11 is never referred to explicitly in the work, but indirectly as *ano koto* (that thing). Despite the plot of the story being the same, the 2011 version *feels* completely different, because 'that thing' has permeated every aspect of life.

Through a seemingly innocent juxtaposition of these two versions, Kawakami demonstrates the devastating effects of 3.11, in which everything that was normal in the past has changed beyond repair. The juxtaposition serves to highlight the fact that the abnormalities of life post-3.11 make us appreciate these normal moments that were perhaps overlooked prior to the earthquake. The 2011 version also demonstrates that we can no longer read the original version in the same way—and, by extension, we can no longer read or write any piece of literature in the same way. Kawakami achieves this effect in her work by inserting words such as 'plutonium', 'caesium' and 'sV' (sieverts) that would perhaps not otherwise have appeared in her fantastical writing.⁹

It is significant that Kawakami chose to rewrite this short story at this particular moment. Even in the original version, the bear in the story seems to represent the kind of real *kizuna* associated with traditional Japanese values and customs. When the bear moves to the same building

8 Although the bear is referred to with male pronouns here, the gender of the bear is not stated in the novel.

9 All English translations for *Kamisama*, *Kamisama 2011* and the postscript are works of Ted Goossen and Shibata Motoyuki, taken from *March was Made of Yarn*.

as *watashi*, he goes to greet all his neighbours on the same floor of his building (and to the three remaining households post-3.11 in *Kamisama 2011*) with some *soba* noodles and 10 postcards. *Watashi* seems to consider this unnecessary, which is a reflection of the erosion of these traditional bonding customs in Japanese society. Further, the bear appears to be moved by the fact that *watashi* is a distant relative of someone who helped him a lot in the past (or during the post-3.11 evacuation process in *Kamisama 2011*) and uses the old-fashioned word *enishi* (fate) to describe the situation. These gestures and words lead *watashi* to consider the bear to be old-fashioned and she reasons that the bear's non-human status is to blame for this—the bear needs to be overly considerate to others to be accepted in human society. The fact that the bear's traditionally Japanese actions appear odd and old-fashioned shows how much Japanese society has changed and how little *kizuna* there remains in Japanese society. Later on, when the bear offers to sing a lullaby to *watashi* before her nap, *watashi* refuses, saying she can fall asleep without it (p. 13). This prompts a disappointed expression on the bear's face, probably because the lullaby was intended less as a pragmatic tool to help *watashi* fall asleep than as a moment of bonding between them. He feels slightly offended that his offer was refused. *Watashi* seems unable to even recognise these signs of *kizuna*, let alone to strengthen her bonds with others.

In *Kamisama 2011*, the nuclear meltdowns in Fukushima are shown to have exacerbated this lack of *kizuna* between humans. Although the bear is punched and kicked by a little child in *Kamisama*, this violence is portrayed partly as a childlike and innocent act. However, in *Kamisama 2011*, where there are no longer any children, two men in protective gear ('Long Gloves' and 'Sunglasses') simply come up to the bear and *watashi* and pull on the bear's fur while talking about its resistance to radiation. Although there is less physical violence involved, the way the man in the sunglasses refuses to look the bear straight in the eye and talks about the bear as if he is not even there makes the encounter much more hostile. Conversely, the bear remains considerate and polite in *Kamisama 2011*, hiding his true feelings from *watashi* by saying, 'I guess they meant well' (p. 30). However, he sounds much less certain than in the original version, in which he says 'young people don't mean any harm, you know' (p. 10).

The fact that this messenger of *kizuna* takes the form of a bear is significant. The bear may not literally be a creature of another species, but rather a metaphor for those who are discriminated against in Japanese society for looking different. The bear, who eats pâté and radishes with

a baguette for lunch, whereas *watashi* eats an *umeboshi* (pickled plum) rice ball, is a foreign figure to some extent, although bears are often seen around humans in Fukushima. This bear seems to belong neither in bear society nor in human society. In *Sōjō no chūshoku* [The luncheon on the grass], a story that appears in the original *Kamisama* collection of short stories as a sequel to *Kamisama*, the bear eventually feels ostracised in a human society that lacks *kizuna* and goes back to live with his fellow bears. Tragically, Kawakami seems to suggest that there is no longer a place for real *kizuna* in modern Japan. Whether one views the bear as an animal or as a metaphorical figure, it is clear that the novel is making a comment on Japanese society. In a society in which strong community ties have been lost, people have much to learn about *kizuna* from these outsiders, whom Kawakami refers to as ‘symbols of minorities’ (Kawakami & Numano, 2012).

Kawakami also implies that an Earth without bears or nature is not a sustainable place for humans to live. As Kawakami points out in the afterword to her book, Japanese people traditionally believed in a divine presence or spirit in all existing objects and living beings (*yaoyorozu no kami*), including mountains, rivers, rain and animals, as well as wells and even toilets (p. 39). Evoking this respectful *kizuna* that humans had with nature, Kawakami asks what the God of Uranium would think of our exploitation of this natural resource (p. 43). Kawakami is suggesting here that we have made a kind of vindictive god (*tatarigami*) out of the God of Uranium and that Japanese people have forgotten their general sense of reverence for those elements of nature that make their current lifestyles possible. She also warns her readers of the dangers of playing God. The nuclear reactions that happened over billions of years have reduced radioactivity to a level that finally ensures that human beings can inhabit the planet. Kawakami points out the irony that humans are risking turning Earth into an uninhabitable planet again by playing with nuclear power.

Conventional Japanese literature focuses on the portrayal of the self, or *watashi* (as typified by the ‘I novel’ genre, known as *watakushi shōsetsu* or *shishōsetsu*). Although the boundaries of the genre are subject to debate, ‘I novels’ are generally written from the point of view of the author, whether in the form of a first-person or third-person narrator and have strong autobiographical tendencies.¹⁰ Kawakami’s works

10 For an in-depth exploration of the genre, see Fowler (1992).

portray a different worldview, in which *watashi* is but a tiny existence in a world that will continue to revolve without these individuals. *Watashi* is not completely insignificant—Kawakami believes that each person's perspective still matters (Kawakami & Numano, 2012). In Kawakami's worldview, although humans have a contribution to make, they must realise that they are not as significant as they think. Such a view leads to better *kizuna* with nature. *Kamisama 2011* warns humans who act as though they are rulers of the vast playground of planet Earth that they are children, who still have much to fear from nature. Unlike the traditional Japanese association of earthquakes with an angry catfish, which aims to convey a similar message using scare tactics, Kawakami's story evokes feelings of shame, with particular pertinence in contemporary Japan.

Like Wagō, Kawakami also evokes the *kizuna* that exists (or that needs to be strengthened) between Japanese people and future generations. Novelist Takahashi Gen'ichirō (2011a) includes a chapter in his post-3.11 novel *Koisuru genpatsu* [A nuclear reactor in love], called *Shinsai bungaku ron* [An essay on earthquake literature], in which he reviews some of the literary texts he believes to be relevant to 3.11. Although it is by no means clear whether this chapter reflects Takahashi's opinion, since it is part of a novel and not an essay, his analysis of Kawakami's text is worth mentioning. The Kawakami work discussed by Takahashi is an imaginary text, built on both versions (*Kamisama* and *Kamisama 2011*). Takahashi's version is *Kamisama (2011)*, which is a new and merged text that adds parentheses to Kawakami's *Kamisama* and *Kamisama 2011* to indicate parts that have been added or deleted. Takahashi focuses his analysis on the aforementioned confrontation scenes, in which the child punches and kicks the bear in the original version and the two men, who were accompanying the child in the original version, simply pull the bear's fur and talk about him as if he is not there, in the post-3.11 version. Takahashi claims that superimposing the two texts in this manner creates an effect of the children talking behind the men as if they are ghosts (p. 210). Although the ghost-like presence of children could be interpreted as the spirits of the young victims of the earthquake and tsunami, Takahashi prefers to consider them as being the future victims of radiation poisoning—children who will be killed by radiation or who will never be brought into this world due to fears about the effects of radiation (p. 211). For Takahashi, *Kamisama (2011)* is Kawakami's display of commitment towards future generations as a member of current society, in line with Kawakami's humble and respectful attitude towards the world.

Kawakami's vision of community also involves *kizuna* and offers reconciliation with those who were directly involved in the nuclear meltdowns. Kawakami prefers to refer to nuclear incidents as 'that thing' (*ano koto*) to avoid placing the full blame on those who operated the power plant (e.g. by calling them *genpatsu jiko* or nuclear accidents). She shows that the incident was not created solely at the nuclear power plants in Fukushima, but rather there was a large network of people who contributed to it, including politicians, workers and consumers. This displays Kawakami's willingness to accept some of the blame as a member of society who used electricity derived from nuclear power without questioning its safety. In this vision, all Japanese citizens who used electricity were in some way involved in the disaster and bear some responsibility for future consequences. Kawakami does not use quotation marks for *watashi's* dialogue, as though she is intending to merge the reader's consciousness with *watashi's*. The whole story reads as though it is a daydream. Kawakami guides her readers to accept what has already happened and move forward, living in harmony with nature, so that their homeland can be passed onto future generations without further damage.

Wagō and Kawakami challenge and then expand on the narrative of *kizuna*, which has been repeated in mainstream media following 3.11. Rather than denying or questioning the existence of this *kizuna* in Japanese society, Wagō and Kawakami present visions of *kizuna* that they believe to be more relevant to the physical and emotional reconstruction of the disaster-hit areas, at times referring back to traditional Japanese worldviews. Most notably, both authors emphasise the importance of *kizuna* with nature as well as with future generations as part of their new vision for Japan, even though these elements were not included in the popular notion of *kizuna* that was used by the mainstream media and the general public.

Traditional Living in *Ano hi kara no manga* by Shiriagari Kotobuki

Manga artist Shiriagari Kotobuki's post-3.11 work is similar to those of Kawakami and Wagō in that he also places emphasis on a more sustainable future for Japan. In terms of style, Shiriagari's *manga* was an approachable, yet no less serious, form of social engagement, which was appreciated by many in the months following the disaster. Shiriagari's

work *Umibe no mura* [Seaside village] in the May 2011 issue of *Comic Beam* broke the post-3.11 *jishuku*—self-restraint or self-censorship, to borrow Jacqueline Berndt’s term (2013, p. 72)—silence in the *manga* industry (responding to the *fukinshin* criticism outlined in the section ‘The End of “Cool Japan”?’ in Chapter 1), which saw publishers refrain from carrying works related to disasters or nuclear power as a sign of respect towards the disaster victims and their families. Most notably, the chapter *Genshiryokyu mafia* [Nuclear-power mafia] in *Hakuryū-LEGEND* [White dragon-LEGEND] by Tennōji Dai and Watanabe Michio, the first instalment of which was published in February 2011, was discontinued because it coincidentally portrayed the death of a subcontract worker in a nuclear power plant (Berndt, 2013, p. 75). Despite these circumstances, partly fuelled by a necessity to keep writing for his serialised *yonkoma* (four-frame) *manga* on the national daily, *Asahi Shimbun* (under the title *Chikyū Bōeike no hitobito* [The Earth Defenders]), Shiriagari continued to publish at his usual pace following 3.11. For example, the *yonkoma* was published as usual on Saturday 12 March 2011; on Monday 14 March, Shiriagari made his first reference to 3.11. Many other *manga* artists followed suit in their portrayal of the earthquake following Shiriagari’s courageous publications.¹¹

Ano hi kara no manga [Manga since that day] is a publication containing a collection of works by Shiriagari, all written in the few months following 3.11. The publication belongs to the *Beam Comix* series published by Enterbrain, with many works first published in the monthly *manga* magazine *Comic Beam*, from the same publisher. The selection of texts is varied because the publication traces Shiriagari’s writings in chronological order, starting from the *yonkoma* from *Chikyū Bōeike no hitobito* on the back of the front cover, which was published on 14 March 2011, to the wordless comic *Sora to mizu* [Sky and water], published in the August 2011 issue of *Comic Beam*. Some of the works, such as *Chikyū Bōeike* are drawn in Shiriagari’s characteristic humorous ‘gag’ *manga* style,¹² drawn in a deliberately childish and rough way, whereas others, such as *Sora to*

11 See Berndt (2013, p. 72) for an overview of non-fiction *manga* works published after 3.11, including documentary-style *manga*, essay *manga* and educational *manga*.

12 The *gyagu* or ‘gag’ *manga* form usually involves humorous *manga* made up of one or four frames, which appear ‘in Japanese newspapers as well as manga magazines and anthologies’ (Bryce & Davis, 2010, pp. 40–41), typically drawn using a simplistic style. Further, ‘humor in manga encompasses an astonishing range of styles or expressions such as satire, gaglike punch lines, surrealistic absurdities, parody, comedy, caricature and outright nonsense’ (p. 40) and ‘gag’ *manga* is just one of them. Mary Knighton (2014) explored Shiriagari’s ‘gag’ *manga* works from *Ano hi kara no manga* in detail.

mizu and *Umibe no mura* [The village by the sea] (May 2011) are more experimental. The publication was met with considerable critical and popular success, reprinted over six times within a year of being published and awarded one of the 15th Media Arts Excellency Awards from Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs in February 2012. Shiriagari also received one of the 2014 Medals of Honour with Purple Ribbon from the Emperor for his recent work.

Because these texts are in chronological order, the publication provides a rare insight into the development of public sentiment surrounding the earthquake. In Shiriagari's (2011b) own words, 'scientists can produce numbers and politicians can produce policies, so I thought about what manga artists could do and decided that I could portray *kūki* (air or atmosphere, here mood)'. Shiriagari explains that although he does not know for sure what the scientific data surrounding 3.11 represents, he thought he would be able to add feelings and *kūki* to these representations by using his imagination and felt that this was part of his role as an artist. The text is similar to the aforementioned works by Wagō and Kawakami in that it attempts to represent what was not portrayed by facts or the mainstream media in response to the disaster. For Berndt (2013), *Ano hi kara no manga* invited readers 'to contemplate and communicate on what kind of life to lead and what fundamental changes to accept', rather than telling them what to do or think (p. 74). Since before 3.11, Shiriagari's style (especially in his *yonkoma*) has been to 'drop the ball in the middle of the debate' (2004, p. 16), exposing flaws in both sides rather than adopting a particular view. This is perhaps why his *manga* became so popular following the disaster. Shiriagari does not spell out the tragedy or devastation of the disaster, preferring instead to use his words and images for portrayals of hope and humorous stabs at society. Shiriagari observes that mainstream popular Japanese *manga* depict universal feelings in stories that develop at high speeds, which grip readers around the world by giving them an adrenaline rush (J. A. C. Project, 2006, p. 72), which is a similar form of entertainment to an attraction at an amusement park (Shiriagari, 2011c, p. 23). Shiriagari's own work is quite different to this mainstream form of *manga*, which is commonly appreciated in the West and provokes thought by being more ambiguous.

Shiriagari's stance with regard to post-3.11 expression has been to maintain his socially engaged gag style in the face of the disaster and continue writing, rather than letting this unprecedented situation influence his form. As Knighton (2014) contended, despite the name of Shiriagari's

publication, ‘Manga since that day’, what really changed ‘since that day’ was not so much his style but rather ‘the serious attention his manga garnered when he dared to take the crisis as subject matter for humor and commentary so soon after 3.11’. Shiriagari is no stranger to the portrayal of disaster and death since before 3.11: his *Jakaranda* [Jacaranda], published in June 2005 by Seirin Kōgeisha, is a 300-page story of a colossal tree that starts growing in the middle of Tokyo, crushing buildings and killing people in its way. He also humorously explored the topic of death extensively in works such as *Hinshi no essayist* [The dying essayist] and *O-i memento mori* [Hey, memento mori], as well as in his best-known work, *Mayonaka no Yaji-san Kita-san* [Yaji and Kita: The Midnight Pilgrims], which has also been turned into a film. Further, his 1986 *manga Gerogero pūsuka* (a new edition of this was published post-3.11) responded to the Chernobyl disaster by portraying a world in which only the elderly and children up to 14 years of age could survive.

In *Ano hi kara no manga*, Shiriagari suggests that there may be a solution to the problems that Japan is facing in the Japanese fondness for nature and modest ways of life. *Umibe no mura* is one of the works portraying Shiriagari’s vision for Japan’s future—50 years after 3.11, humans have abandoned nuclear energy and fossil fuels, relying on solar panels for electricity. There is no longer any air-conditioning in homes or street lights in the cities and being able to watch television is a rare event, dependent on the functioning of the solar panels. Although the grandfather of the family finds it difficult to adapt to this new way of life, both men and women of the next generation are more accepting of the change and their children are brought up to believe that this way of life is normal. Although they have heard of nuclear power plants, these children can only imagine what life would have been like for their parents when they were younger because this modest way of life is the only one they know. The youngest child of the family, who is the first in the family to have developed wings (this phenomenon is suggested to be part of the evolutionary process), is symbolically named ‘Mirai’, or ‘Hope’. The story does indeed end with hope—the construction of a renewable energy power plant in the village is announced, which is likely to improve the quality of life in the community. The last page, composed of a single panel portraying a starry sky, follows the granddaughter’s words of encouragement to her grandfather that these changes may bring back the material wealth that he longed for, to which he replies, his face covered in tears, ‘But back in our days, we didn’t have such beautiful starry skies’ (pp. 33–34).

Shiriagari (2011b) explains this work as being made possible by the power of cultural expression, which allows for the lack of material wealth to be considered as something beautiful. He describes this tendency to find beauty in modest ways of living by giving as examples the Japanese concepts of *hakanai* (fleeting), *mujō* (derived from the Buddhist concept of impermanence and the aesthetic of transience) and *aware* (or *mono no aware*, meaning empathy and sadness, which comes from an awareness of impermanence). The parents' generation in *Umibe no mura* have obtained happiness by gaining awareness of this transient nature of material wealth and striving instead for spiritual wealth: 'Many things were lost ... and we decided to try a different path ... We decided to choose everlasting happiness instead of living conveniently, under the constant fear of losing our material wealth' (p. 26). Although the family's wooden house appears run-down, with laundry hanging outside and filled with retro objects, such as the low *chabudai* dining table with *zabuton* floor cushions, there is a sense of strong community ties (*kizuna* in post-3.11 language) and a carefree way of life reminiscent of the Shōwa 30s (the mid-1950s). These core years of the Shōwa period, which are often subjects of nostalgic depictions in Japanese popular culture, typically represent stress-free happiness and hope for the future in the Japanese consciousness.¹³ The two-page image of evolved, winged children flying over the remains of the nuclear power plant, covered in windmills, which was also published in the *Magnitude ZERO* collection of illustrations, symbolises the spiritual freedom obtained by future generations as a result of the earlier generations giving up their material wealth (pp. 28–29).¹⁴

However, Shiriagari (2011d) claims that *Umibe no mura* does not represent his ideal future, but rather just one version of multiple possible futures that he arrived at through a process of elimination. Shiriagari started on the work around 20 March and this rather bleak portrayal of Japan's future was Shiriagari's attempt to portray hope at a time when he was observing uncertainty everywhere. Shiriagari is not suggesting that humankind should abandon modern technology. Instead, he offers a comforting portrayal of the resilience of the Japanese people and their fondness for a more primitive way of life, which would allow them to survive and get by in the worst-case scenario. In this way, Shiriagari fully

13 For an exploration of the 'Showa Retro Boom' phenomenon in Japan, see Thompson (2011).

14 Since Shiriagari's publication, this idea of 'living with less' has taken off, both in Japan and the rest of the world, with the minimalist movement as well as the huge success of Marie Kondo's books on decluttering.

harnesses the power of literary imagination. The ability to portray imagined alternative futures, regardless of whether they are likely to happen, is part of what distinguishes literature from other more factual media.

Shiriagari (2011c, p. 20) observed that people stopped being affected by trivial matters following the disaster and ‘raised their faces up’, looking towards the future of the world surrounding them. Despite the tragedy of the earthquake, he observed a positive trend in ‘people getting interested in matters which they previously considered to be unrelated to them, such as the situation in the Tōhoku region or even visions of how the world will look like in the far future’ (Shiriagari, 2011c, p. 20). Imaginative *manga* works depicting this post-3.11 *kūki* in Japan, such as those by Shiriagari, are valuable resources for gaining insight into the future visions of the Japanese. In the words of Berndt (2013), ‘being a site of imaginary worlds rather than direct depictions of social reality, manga may be expected to make important contributions’ (p. 78) in picturing an alternative future post-3.11.

Wagō, Kawakami and Shiriagari all portray the issue of moral debasement in contemporary Japanese society due to technological advances and convey a sense that the disaster occurred as a wake-up call to alert the Japanese to their ethical degradation. This took the form of portrayals of the erosion of traditional values and community ties, as symbolised by the out-of-placeness of Kawakami’s bear, the degradation of the relationship between Japanese people and nature as depicted in Wagō’s work and the old man who hangs on to his capitalist values and greed in Shiriagari’s *Umibe no mura*. Current Japanese society is contrasted with traditional Japanese society, which is portrayed as being ideal and altruistic, characterised by a respectful, Shintoistic and harmonious relationship between nature and humans. Traditional Japanese values, which are romanticised and idealised, are used as a way of reclaiming Japanese identity in the face of the perceived breakdown of Japan’s status as a technological superpower. In this way, this group of 3.11 literature shares many of the concerns that have been explored in other environmental texts. In post-Chernobyl literature, which is a prime example of environmental literature, the warning against environmental degradation was a means of recovering Ukrainian cultural identity and traditional values under industrialising Soviet rule (Sukhenko, 2014, p. 128). Ukraine is an interesting case study because it has ‘its own unique cultural traditions and perspectives regarding the natural world, rooted in pre-Christian beliefs and rituals’ (Sukhenko, 2014, p. 114), which are similar to Shintō. A comparison between these post-3.11 texts and post-Chernobyl literature is likely to be a fruitful object for future study.

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