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Pregnant Violence in Post-3.11 Fiction

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This essay explores the violence and the threat of violence associated with pregnancy in Japanese fiction after the triple disasters—the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown—of March 11, 2011. Catastrophe and disaster mark a limit-experience—in the sense proposed by George Bataille and Maurice Blanchot—indicated, for one, by the ruptures at the boundaries of sensibility.¹ “Tohoku disasters” refers to three different events, uneven in the distribution of disastrous effects: the destruction of the earthquakes, the flooding of the tsunami, and the effects of radiation. It is the latter, radiation, that is my focus here, because it figures so largely in the fiction that I will analyze below. Radiation works as an ominous threat that is everywhere and can be sensed nowhere. This is violence to the landscape and to the creatures who live in contaminated areas. Works such as Furukawa Hideo’s (古川日出男, b. 1966) *Uma tachi yo sore demo hikari wa muku de*, (2011, 馬たちよ、それでも光は無垢で、*Horses, Horses in the End the Light Remains Pure*, 2016) and Kimura Yusuke’s (木村裕介, b. 1970) *Seichi Cs* (2014, 聖地 Cs, *Sacred Cesium Ground*, 2019) and *Isa no hanran* (2016, イサの氾濫, *Isa’s Deluge*, 2019) wrestle with the fictional technical issues of representing the unrepresentable—the magnitude and incomprehensibility of disaster (in this case the earthquake destruction, tsunami ravages, and radiation I have just mentioned). They also wrestle with how best to portray creaturely interiorities and the precarities of human and animal life. They take up the central questions of fiction, exploring the parallel challenges of portraying human and animal life and disaster. In post-disaster Japanese fiction, a palette of images arises; chief among them, and my focus here, are the reactions of women and men, and often of a pregnant woman, in the context of pregnancy and child-bearing. The threat of domestic violence



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comes to the fore in the extreme situation represented by the stress of life after the disasters. This violence often turns on questions of a woman's health, and nearly always on childbirth and childbearing, particularly, of course, when the gaze is turned to women in their twenties and thirties. In this essay I explore the violence and the threat of violence—the harm, that is, visible and invisible, to bodies—associated with pregnancy in Japanese fiction after the triple disasters. I do so via analysis of the following works: Sono Shion's (園子温 b. 1961) 2014 film *Kibō no kuni* (希望の国, *Land of hope*), Kanehara Hitomi's (金原ひとみ, b. 1983) *Motazaru mono* (もたざるもの, *Those we cannot hold onto*, 2015), Taguchi Randy's (田口ランディ, b.1959) collection of stories *Zōn ni te* (ゾーンにて, *In the zone*, 2013), and Kimura Yūsuke's (b. 1970) *Seichi Cs* (2014, 聖地 Cs, *Sacred Cesium Ground*, 2019). These works, more than most, congeal not only around depictions of post-disaster life, but wrestle with issues of that life in the shadow of pregnancy and childbirth. In these works, we will find not just the obvious—that childbearing in a disaster zone is profoundly anxiety-producing—but the particular ways in which childbirth, and then women's bodies, become at times metaphor and at times synecdoche for the trauma and fears throughout Japanese society. The nuclear threat is a violent one threatening to disorder the foundations of physical and emotional life. There is hardly a female character in the fiction considered here that is not confronted with questions about pregnancy and childbirth. The queries are surely motivated by genuine concern about the humans involved, but they are just as often about control, about a woman's body as a public item, about responsibility to the child, and then to society at large. Pregnancy, and child-bearing, also becomes a point focusing potential violence as systems of control seem less about healthy children and happy families and more about policing boundaries around women, especially their mid-sections.

The Tohoku disasters of March 2011 figure like a black hole, a whirling vortex that threatens to suck all into its center, to wipe and leave blurred, to leave a smudge across the frame of existence, distort and render unreadable the lines of experience. In so doing, in erasing all sense and sensibility, the Tohoku disasters eradicate any confidence we might have in our senses. What we see and experience seems impossible, seems to defy physics. The experience is surreal: the very experience of it is contrary to any sense. The experiences are of things that simply should not be: ships on roads, boats on schools, surging waves that would carry professional surfers through rice fields. If that is the case, what does the

breakdown of sense mean for us as human beings? What does it say about the embodied experience of the world? Among other things, it washes away the foundations of meaning and experience, collapses the pillars of identity.

Fiction writers wrestle with the possibilities of portraying the facticity of something as dangerous and destructive to the core of carbon-based bodies, to the physical being of animals and humans, as radiation; how does one deal with radiation that is, literally, in-sensible, non-sensible, non-sensical? It does not register by any of the sensory means available to us humans: not by touch, sight, sound, taste, or smell.² It is a classic horror film scenario: there is an impending threat, one that grows in intensity, one that haunts every crevice, threatens to crawl in and back out of every orifice and pore, one that is inescapable, one that works by a different physics, one that follows different conceptions of time, and one that cannot be sensed. A haunting dread, threat, a building suspense, the “unnatural” threat of something that lies outside the realms of normalcy.³ For example, when the narrator of Kimura’s *Seichi Cs* comes across the corpse of a cow that had been left in the field, she finds that “its anus gaped open like a cave. ... I found myself staring. ... I was beset by a dread I couldn’t identify. Eyes. Nose. Mouth. Buttocks. From those gaping holes...an unfathomable black snakelike something seemed to be slithering out.”⁴

It is obvious why pregnancy would provide focus for scenarios in which radiation is a character. Of course it does. The frightening and unseen threat of radiation threatens at the most basic level of life, wreaking havoc on the very DNA of life, with ramifications throughout bodily experience. It therefore also threatens the very fabric of emotional life, the hopes and dreams of family life, and parenting. I do not assume that everyone hopes for such a traditional family, but the power of that emotional force carries great weight in the works I discuss.

Sono Shion’s 2014 film *Kibō no kuni* was successful in providing images that I, at least, and I think many others, find hard to shake for the imagery provided about a number of post-disaster issues.⁵ The film has become something of a touchstone because it taps into a number of important images that feel definitive of post-disaster life. It has a raw power of unfiltered and unedited imagery. It came out quickly after the disasters and, with all its flaws and rough edges—by which I mean its tendency to oversimplify and its melodramatic turns—it captures something important. Sono seems to also be trying to render visible the invisible radiation. One of the strong images of the film speaks to the

arbitrary drawing of lines imposed in the form of concentric circles, at ten, twenty, and thirty kilometers from reactor site, intended to mark the line between safety and danger, radiation and normalcy. In the film, such lines delimiting “safe” from “unsafe,” demarcating “livable” from “forced evacuation,” separate two sides of the same property, the two halves of the same house. The film highlights how the boundaries of the evacuation zone were imposed arbitrarily, but the imagery is not far from the actualities in the radiated zones, where the boundary lines were laid down in straight lines across a map, with little concern for the actual landscape. Little account for hills and valleys, it would seem, and little account for the houses that lie in the boundary-line’s path. Sono has referenced his visits to Fukushima Prefecture, and to Minamisōma in particular, where he encountered the haunting image that he employs to propel the film: a house literally split in two by the capricious and administrative line drawn across the landscape to separate “safe” zone and evacuation zone. In a particularly strong example from the film, a fence bifurcates the house where much of the action takes place. Sono repeatedly references how, in the radiation zone of the actual Minamisōma, there are properties where the line literally goes down the middle, cutting in two a house and a garden. He writes of seeing a garden with flowers in bloom on the habitable side and withered flowers on the other side, because it was out of reach, beyond the zone. Same garden, rent artificially in two, by a line straight down the middle of a property.⁶

The film focuses on two neighbors and their extended families and the different fates of each when the line of separation is laid down the middle of their properties. For this essay, the salient image is that of the desperate and fearful mother, learning she is pregnant, faced with how to respond, who takes to sealing off their home with duct tape. She wears a hazmat suit to the grocery store where she examines vegetables also encased in plastic: the protective layers she wears seem to mirror the protective layers wrapped around the food she prepares to purchase.

There is violence at many levels in this, of course. Homes are split apart, neighbors are separated, there is the violence turned inward, of society and the fearful responses of those who ostracize this pregnant woman, as though she were the source of the threat. It is hard to characterize this film as ending happily, but it is unexpected, both in the palette of images for these story lines, and in Sono’s oeuvre more generally. Rather than the suicides, mass shootings, and bloody fist-fights of so many of his films, the husband comes to his wife’s aid instead of ostracizing her.

Post-radiation life does indeed leave many families ripped apart, often divided over the role and fear that is attached to women's bodies: fear of deformed children or the inability to bear children at all and, concomitantly, what it means to be a "woman." "Disaster divorce" (原発離婚 *genpatsu rikon*) is not uncommon, families literally torn apart by the wedge of making choices in extreme situations.⁷ Often it is one partner wanting to leave the contaminated area and one wanting to stay. We often find that it is the men who want to stay in the community with their social validation and roles while women tend to want to leave with the children.⁸ We will find this in the fiction discussed below, in Kimura Yūsuke's novel, for example, where the suggestion that the difference of opinion about radiation is one reason why Nishino does not want to return to her husband and also in Kanehara Hitomi's *Motazaru mono*, who sets it up in the opposite direction, with the man/husband who is "hysterical." (I intentionally invoke this word here for reasons I will discuss at more length below.)

Returning to Sono's film, Christophe Thouny has written, in his analysis of *Kibō no kuni* the following:

The countercartography proposed by Sono Shion relies on a new sense of time and place that he articulates around the two figures of the hysterical mother and the ghost child. The child and the woman have been commonly associated in modernity with a dangerous generative power that disturbs the linear narrative of progress.⁹

Further, Thouny states that the "problem posed by nuclear radiation is that it radically disturbs our usual understanding of space and time."¹⁰ Mothers, children, and pregnant mothers are thus the flashpoint in these narratives, the point at which people feel they cannot just live with the impossible. The desire to protect, to save is so strong that it erupts sideways into violence. It makes it impossible to ignore the invisible radiation.

This provides another way to conceive of and explain the "horror" of the radiation. Under the threat of radiation even time is disrupted; time no longer seems to move forward in a straight line, it is not governed by a sense of progress, of moving forward, of goals. It is nebulous and stuck. It accumulates at uneven speeds; it disperses at various speeds. It is a "problem of visibility and invisibility," in Thouny's words.¹¹ It is the more horrific thereby. It is the wedge that divides family members. Radiation is invisible and transverses human and all other boundaries, be they boundaries of skin in animals, humans, or plants, be they nations or

prefectures, be they the lines in the sand drawn by bureaucrats and administrators: boundaries are meaningless; containment is meaningless; maps are useless; mappings and lines are ridiculous and ludicrous. The way that radiation traverses these spheres, of course, is one of the main images driving the film. Borders mark nothing: the random lines are meaningless, so crossing them feels meaningless as well. Duct tape and hazmat suits are something--they are more than nothing, after all--but also meaningless. The spaces they should demarcate become invisible. The radiation is bent on killing us, by transgressing borders and destroying life.

Which is why I would insist that this anxiety is real; it is not “hysterical”: a word that suggests in its etymology an irrational over-reaction particular to women. I take the ubiquity of imagery of containment—again, duct tape and hazmat suits inside an apartment—in this literature as a proof of the obvious: the situation is seriously and deeply anxiety producing. It invades internal domestic spaces. What would one do, what would I do, in the face of this?¹² The gendered nature of this violence and the gendered responses to it are also ubiquitous. As Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt points out, referencing one example of this, “[t]he public face of anti-nuke protests is female, and often that of a mother.”¹³ On another front, David Slater and his team have recorded some of this in their fieldwork in, for example, the preponderance of the attribution of women as the source of “harmful rumors” (*fuhyō higai* 不評被害).¹⁴ One also thinks of the very real, very wrenching stories of, and the consistency with which such stories are recorded, the experience of women caught at the nexus of needing to choose between being a good wife—i.e. silent and supportive of the structured and gendered structures of the traditional home (*ie* 家) in the face of radiation threats and its horrors—and good mothers—evacuating or becoming activists in order to fulfill an understanding of ways to safeguard and nurture those children. *Kibō no kuni* captures these polarities more vividly than most. Again, that a phenomenon with a name such as “disaster divorce” exists should give some sense of the pervasiveness of the issue.

Sono, in his film, gives us the image of a young pregnant wife and mother desperately trying to protect herself and family by sealing up the crevices in her house and by donning a hazmat suit to go grocery shopping. Kanehara Hitomi, known for her dramatic debut as the youngest Akutagawa prize winner with *Hebi ni piasu* (2003, 蛇にピアス, *Snakes and Earrings*, 2005), provides the counter example in her 2015 novel *Motazaru mono*. One is inclined—I think invited—to read this novel

against the story line of Kanehara's life outside of fiction: she was pregnant with her second child at the time of the disasters; she first evacuates from Tokyo to Okayama, eventually moving with her children to Paris, although she did not know France or speak French. The move to Okayama is to relatives on her mother's side; the move to Paris is with children and without husband, which seems to have added special charge in media coverage.¹⁵ She found herself as one of those people who in her reactions to the daily invisible threats of radiation discovered that she was much more passionate about the dangers of radiation, that her thinking was at odds with those around her and which left her "[w]ondering who is crazy: is it me? Or is it society that is crazy?"¹⁶ Her novel probes questions such as "Where does prudence and care begin and end?" "What is rational in the face of the horror of radiation?"

Motazaru mono is organized around the intersecting and sometime parallel tales of four people after the disasters. One of these characters, a woman, has a sister who is ridiculed by the narrator as "over-reacting" (I think we are to think "hysterical" here, in the pejorative, gendered sense I hinted at above) because she leaves the country with her children; but this is a story line similar to Kanehara's own. That is, there seems to be some self-deprecating irony at play here. But in the context of discussing Sono's film, of interest to me in Kanehara's tale is that it is the male character Shu who cannot fathom why everyone, especially his wife, is not panicked and concerned about radiation, particularly in the context of caring for their young daughter. Here it is Shu, the husband, rather than the pregnant wife in Sono's film (and I would suggest, much of the popular imagination) who ends up sealing all the crevices in the house with duct tape (and who gives up and slumps to the floor when the role of tape reaches its end). The whole situation is absurd and horrific: where does one stop in protection; does it even make sense to go to the store to buy more tape if "outside" is dangerous, the very thing we are trying to keep at bay; what might prudence or rationality mean in such a pervasive insidious threat? Here it is Shu, the husband, who is the one who insists on ordering foodstuffs and everything else from overseas, who insists that his wife relocate to Kyoto while he stays in Tokyo because of the demands of work (a fictional scenario widely replicated in the ethnographic interviews).¹⁷ Among the things that Kanehara has done with this scene is to provide the "hysterical" character as the husband/father, and not the wife/mother. Given that so many artistic interactions with post-disaster life, such as Sono Shion's film, cast the women as inconsolable and extreme in their reactions, Kanehara

seems to be playing against gender stereotypes in casting the story in this way. One conclusion? “Each and every family has its own individual nuclear accident. Each and every family has its own varieties of nuclear damage.”¹⁸

Here is also the horror and the threat: Sipos offers, writing about the genre of horror film, that “[h]orror presupposes a *threat*, building tension with its promise that something hideous will occur, and there is no escape,” going on to note that many things are “threatening” but horror introduces the “unnatural” threat that is outside the realms of normalcy.¹⁹ As Prince writes of the genre, “[t]he anxiety at the heart of the genre is, indeed, the nature of human being.”²⁰ It is the fright of being human, about being human, about the humanness of the neighbor. It is about the potential instability of the entire situation, the permeability of borders and the fragility of life, the oppressive unseen threat just beyond the doors and walls that wants to kill and deform.

These themes continue in Taguchi Randy’s collection of stories *Zōn ni te*. The narrator of the stories, a journalist named Hatori Yōko, travels “into the zone” of radioactivity, the evacuation zone, from which the collection takes its name. But it can be hard to identify with this woman. Hatori Yōko is a not-very-successful writer who feels the need to go see Fukushima, who is, in Taguchi’s words “a half-baked person.”²¹ Hatori is a slightly flaky, not so self-aware character, with complicated relationships to radiation and reporting. The text too invites us to think of the overlaps with the author Taguchi, although with some irony of course, because Hatori, like Taguchi herself, has also written a novel about radioactivity, is deeply knowledgeable about Chernobyl, has been following world nuclear events for many years, and seems to have a guilty pleasure in thinking about radiation:²² Kudō Ken’ichi, her interlocutor, will later ask her in the novel, “[y]ou like talking about radiation, don’t you?”²³ Hatori is on a process of self-discovery and the issues of radiation bring it into focus. She asks a friend from Fukushima for contacts. The friend is slightly annoyed at the request because she feels—rightly, the text suggests—that Hatori is motivated by a voyeuristic intent to go and gawk, to go and see something. She is met at Fukushima station by Kudō in his red Audi, the air conditioning of which does not work. In Hatori’s case the experience also feels like being in a movie, but a science fiction movie, rather than a horror film.²⁴ This because, consistent with the impressions I have touched on above, the experience does not quite feel real: “I mean, at least when there are smog alerts, no one breathes in deeply, you know?”

This sort of feels like that. They say radioactivity is also dangerous, but I have to say it doesn't *feel* real [*amari jikkan ga nai n desu*]."²⁵ Before long their drive takes them to Kudō's now abandoned goat farm. But on the way they pass what is clearly the "Hope Ranch" of Kimura's novel, which I will discuss in more detail later. All the signs are there, the people in so many conversations. But she does not want to stop. Nonetheless, they engage in a short conversation about the killing of cattle, and the question is asked [and I paraphrase]:

"Whether killed for human consumption or by government order, does it make any difference to the cows?"

Kudō shoots back, "Not like I have asked the cows."

Hatori continues, "As long as there are people to take care of the cattle they seem to be quite content. There are people at that ranch. That's the only thing that makes this area look different from any other. There are cattle, there are people, and there is, here alone, love [*ai*]. It is here alone that there is some meaning, here alone where there is some order to things [*chitsujo*]."

Kudo's response is, simply: "You're a strange one, aren't you?"²⁶

At which point that particular conversation ends.

More to the point of this discussion, as they travel, the conversation turns to a different subject. Given that the narrator is a woman, the conversation moves to motherhood and childbearing. We find that Kudō's wife, younger by more than twenty years, has fled the area. There is more to this story, we expect, but he turns the focus of the conversation back to Hatori:

"What about you Hatori. You single?"

"I am."

"How old are you?"

She hesitates. "Thirty-eight."

"Which means, you could still have kids. You shouldn't be in a place like this."

"I have no intention of having kids or anything like that."

"Why?"

"Can't give birth all by one's self."

"Not so sure about that. Seem to be lots of women out there who give birth; lots of ways to get sperm."²⁷

At which point the conversation is dropped, they look out the car windows, and make their next stop. But broaching the subject is significant. Kudō

does not simply ask after her thoughts on the matter; he quickly becomes prescriptive and scolding for being in an area of such high radiation. The response of this man is not so much empathy and concern, but to impose limits, paternally scold, and lay down laws.²⁸

In conversation about the gendered reactions to the disasters, Taguchi has offered another image of the threat of radiation, of the horror, the threats from outside, in terms of sexual violence against women—i.e. of *chikan*—on the subway.²⁹ This is the threat of personal violation, of unwanted touch, of groping and penetration, the invasion of *chikan*. The metaphor powerfully captures the gendered difference in the experience. *Chikan* is like radiation because one cannot see where it comes from, one cannot see where the perpetrator has gone. It builds up within you and accumulates. It invades the most private recesses of the body. You cannot even identify the source. Who are you to be angry at? Taguchi resists the obvious gendered aspect of this: it is operative because it is violence by men against women. It is tied to sex and power; it is connected to bodies; it is not far from childbirth and childbearing; it is systematic; it is unseen; it is horrific.

Now, on this issue of violence and its manifestations, the husbands in *Kibō no kuni* and *Motazaru mono* never raise a hand against their wives. Indeed, they are relatively supportive and understanding. But that threat of domestic violence—the raised hand—is well-represented in post-disaster fiction. One more example in this exploration of the imagery attendant upon women and radiation, a kind of counter example really, comes from Kimura Yūsuke's *Seichi Cs*. Nishino, a young woman from Tokyo, has travelled on something of a whim, we think, to rural Fukushima Prefecture in order to volunteer for a few days at a place known in the novel as “Fortress of Hope.” Most Japanese readers will recognize this as based on the “Hope Ranch,” the *Kibō no bokujō* (希望の牧場) that Yoshizawa Masami set up in defiance of the government order to kill the cattle in his herds, the cattle farm that Hatori and Kudō drove past in Taguchi's stories. The actual Yoshizawa, like the Sendō of the novel, tends his cattle within sight of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. It is not entirely clear what has motivated Nishino to make this trip and to take on the kind of physical farm work with which she has no experience, until an important scene where we learn that conflicts and violence in her domestic sphere overlap with the threat of radiation following the disasters. She recounts a conversation with her husband on the night before she goes to volunteer:

He seemed to be in a relatively good mood so I blurted out that I wanted to go to the Fortress of Hope. He heard me out, with a strange expression on his face, and began to laugh. “Give it up, give it up. What are you going to do there? You go someplace with that high level of radiation and, you realize, don’t you, that you will never be able to have children.”

“That’s just not true. That’s the kind of bad science that has caused such pain to the people who live in that region. Think of the people who were in Hiroshima and Nagasaki when those bombs were dropped, there is no proof that the radiation had any effect on their children.”

“Is that so? Is it just that it cannot be proven, then? No proof, you say. I bet that this is just stuff you have seen somewhere on-line. Just believed it. You probably didn’t even research it yourself.”

“As if you have researched any of this. I mean, why this sudden interest from you anyway? Since when have you wanted children anyway?”

“Well, OK, that’s true. I hate kids and stuff. But that’s same as you, right?”

“Those are your words. I have no memory of ever saying that I hate kids.”

“And then there’s the fact that you have at least ten more years of birth-giving ability, so why expose yourself to unnecessary risk?”

“What do you mean by that?”

“What do you mean what do I mean? I mean it would be a waste, during the years when you can still give birth, be a full woman and all.”

Such words: I felt like I had been doused with ice water. I had goosebumps. It was about all I could take. I was completely unable to speak.

“What do you mean by that? You mean if I can no longer give birth to children that I am no longer a woman? Is that what you think?”

My voice was raw; he just snorted a laugh. He didn’t answer. It was that moment, that’s when I decided to go to the farm.³⁰

Nishino expresses interest in volunteering in Fukushima, to which her husband responds by pointing out that “then you will never be able to have children.” She realizes that he associates her as “woman” with “ability to have children.” Her response brings in history, when Nishino says to her husband: “These same assumptions have dogged the women of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.”³¹ His response is to lord over her as husband, threatening physical violence with hand raised and ready to strike; he is haranguing her about responsibility to him as her husband, about upholding the concept of family, about conforming to his idea of the nation. Her response is to leave.

Not just the nuclear disasters of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but as poet Arai Takako (新井高子, b. 1966) discovered while working with female Octogenarians in Ishikawa and Iwate prefectures, the earthquake, tsunami, and meltdown of 2011 were not singular; many of these elder women had lived through similar experiences before. Arai would ask, straightforwardly enough: “What was your experience of the disasters (i.e. tsunami) and they would answer, which one?” These women had experienced at least three major tsunami in their lifetimes.³²

There is one more pregnancy to mention. This one, however, is not of a human but of an animal. Near the end of Furukawa Hideo’s masterful interaction with the 2011 triple disasters, *Uma tachi yo sore demo hikari wa muku de*, the time-traveling character Gyūichirō has a conversation with a horse. Furukawa is thinking about violence on many fronts in this work, the disasters most immediately and the nuclear meltdown and radiation more specifically. He is also intent on placing the violence of the triple disasters within a longer history. For example, he keeps returning to lines such as “Our history, the history of the Japanese, is nothing more than a history of killing people,” in which the violent history being recounted is one that effects humans and animals alike and, often, simultaneously.³³ This Gyūichirō, a man with a dog’s name, who is actually a character from an earlier novel but making an appearance in this one, is a time traveler.³⁴ When he walks under a torii he finds himself in a different era. He also, apparently, can talk to horses. For example, close to the end of the narrative we encounter a scene where he is in the Sengoku period with “a number of horses. He is talking to one of them. He, Gyūichirō, asks, ‘So you are a mare?’”

“‘Yesss’-is not exactly an answer the horse can provide, but in fact it is a mare,” and from there Gyūichirō and the horse embark on a wide-ranging conversation.³⁵ Gyūichirō and the horse share memories of death in battles centuries before, of trauma shared across generations. This overlaps with the distress the triple disasters set in motion; they in turn set in motion Furukawa’s book. In the end, Gyūichirō forecasts a pregnancy for the mare, for a further becoming. The conversation continues:

“Have you returned from the battlefield? From a little joust with the sworn enemy, the Date clan?”

“Yesss”—is not an answer the horse can give, but that is accurate. This horse did not lose her life on the battlefield and she has now been returned to the Sōma holdings. However, its “rider” was not so lucky...

“Making your way through the engagement with the enemy armies with a dead man strapped to your back, was no doubt very difficult. Was it difficult for you?”

“Yesss, yes, yes,” the horse was able to answer through a whinny. He heard the answer quite clearly. He was stroking her neck, and he continued speaking: “But you came back alive. And before long you will become pregnant with a child, give birth, and all will take its turns within the fullness of time. I see that this will come to pass, and I celebrate with you.”

...

The horse he had met in the pasture had returned from battle. The horse is female. He continued with his questioning. He was still stroking her. “In this battle you had to carry the dead soldiers, didn’t you, the warriors. But this will be healed,” he proclaimed. He promised that he would keep an eye on her on into the future. ...³⁶

This pregnancy has different resonances in the time of radiation. We then accompany Gyūichirō as he walks through historical periods, pointing out the lineages that preceded and those that are to come. But the result of the pregnancy was a long line of healthy horses that weathered the wars and famines of the humans in the region.

Furukawa’s pregnancy is not a scene of despair in the shadow of radiation, but of hope. Gyūichirō does not come to impose rules and limits, but to prophesy hope and continuation of life. Kimura’s scene serves to connect the dots in much of this imagery: the movement of the invisible threat of radiation into the very physical realm of the domestic sphere, trailing various violences in its wake. We come to find, as Kanehara suggests, that every family suffers its own version of nuclear damage; at the same time, the fault lines that form around mothers and their bodies is consistent and points to deep structures in the imagination and the experience of post-disaster society.³⁷ Taguchi’s Hatori reminds us how often radiation becomes a conversation that makes clear assumptions that woman = pregnancy and motherhood. Hatori as well as the pregnant mother in Sono’s film are in conflicted spaces where, although they push back and are often better informed than the men around them, the constraints and assumptions operative in their society are also brought out of shadows and silence. The depictions of pregnancy in a time of radiation that we have encountered in the works above serve, at times, as synecdoche—where pregnancy stands in for the entirety of a woman’s experience—at times as metaphor—sometimes a symbol, sometimes a stand-in to highlight other aspects of women’s experience. The violence and horror of radiation threaten to dismember women and children and it

also makes clear what was somewhat more hidden before, namely the systems of control that envelop these women, the defining definition of “woman=mother” that comes to the fore with the threat and horror of radiation. We also find just how close the invisible violence of radiation is to physical bodies by the threats of bodily harm so often encountered.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, the arguments in Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death & Sensuality* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1986) and Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

² Who knows about the animals? Kobayashi Erika’s 小林エリカ, *Madamu Kyūri to chōshoku o マダム・キュリーと朝食を* [Breakfast with Madame Curie] (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2014) imagines cats that can see radiation as we might see light.

³ Thomas M. Sipos, *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Company, 2010), 5.

⁴ Kimura Yusuke, *Seichi Cs* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2014), 62.

⁵ See, for example, Christophe Thouny, who references the “hysterical mother and the ghost child” of the film. “The Land of Hope: Planetary Cartographies of Fukushima, 2012,” *Mechademia* 10 (2015): 17–34 and Rachel DiNitto, whose article notes the “presence of an [invisible] irradiated environment by means of visible markers: fences and cordoned zones, no entry signs, protective gear, masks, and numerical readings on beeping Geiger counters.” “The Fukushima Fiction Film: Gender and the Discourse of Nuclear Containment,” *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 16 (2018): n.p.

⁶ Sono Shion, “*Kibō no kuni Mada owatte inai genpatsu no mondai*” [*Land of Hope and the still unfinished issue of nuclear meltdown*], *Tsukuru* 42.8 (September 2012): 129.

⁷ Cf. “In Stressful Wake of Fukushima Disaster, Japan Now Dealing With ‘Atomic Divorce.’” Accessed May 25, 2020, <https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-02-27/stressful-wake-fukushima-disaster-japan-now-dealing-atomic-divorce>.

⁸ Aya Hirata Kimura and Yohei Katano, “Farming after the Fukushima Accident: A Feminist Political Ecology Analysis of Organic Agriculture.” *Journal of Rural Studies* 34 (2014): 112.

⁹ Thouny, “The Land of Hope: Planetary Cartographies of Fukushima, 2012,” 20.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² See also, because of the issues raised on this point, Yu Miri and Oyamada Hiroko, “Fukushima and Hiroshima o musunde” [Connecting Fukushima and Hiroshima], *Bungakukai* 72.2 (February 2018): 136–149, discussing the ramifications of their own moves into or from radiated zones, with children.

¹³ Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, “Gendering ‘Fukushima’: Resistance, Self-Responsibility, and Female Hysteria in Sono Sion’s *Land of Hope*,” in *Fukushima and the Arts: Negotiating Nuclear Disaster*, ed. by Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt (New York: Routledge, 2017), 116.

¹⁴ This has become an important term in public discourse. David H. Slater, Rika Morioka, and Haruka Danzuka, “Micro-Politics of Radiation.” *Critical Asian Studies* 46.3 (2014): 497 ff.

¹⁵ This is hinted at in her interview (*taidan*) with Setouchi Jakuchō. Setouchi Jakuchō and Kanehara Hitomi, “Kakukoto, Ikirukoto,” *Subaru* 38.9 (2016): 114–123.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁷ I am drawing from the work of Kimura and Katano and that of David Slater, et al.

¹⁸ Kanehara Hitomi, *Motazaru Mono* (Tokyo: Shūeisha, 2015), 46.

¹⁹ Thomas M. Sipos, *Horror Film Aesthetics: Creating the Visual Language of Fear* (Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland & Company, 2010), 5.

²⁰ Stephen Prince, *The Horror Film* (New Brunswick, N. J.: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 2.

²¹ In Masami Yuki, *Foodscapes of Contemporary Japanese Women Writers: An Ecocritical Journey Around the Hearth of Modernity*, trans. Michael Berman (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015), 62.

²² Most representative is her *Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Fukushima: Genshiryoku o ukeireta Nihon* ヒロシマ、ナガサキ、フクシマ：原子力を受け入れた日本 (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 2011).

²³ Taguchi Randy, *Zōn ni te* (Tokyo: Bungei shunjū, 2014), 89.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29, 93.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 16.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 42–43.

²⁷ Ibid., 56.

²⁸ Koikari Mire roots this in history: disasters are extreme events. They highlight the stress points in society, among them gender dynamics. She refers to the masculine aspects in response to war and destruction, drawing examples from as far back as the 1923 Great Kantō earthquake to remind us that the tough, i.e., masculine, stance taken by armies and male politicians has been consistent across generations. Koikari Mire, “Re-masculinizing the nation: gender, disaster, and the politics of national resilience in post-3.11 Japan,” *Japan Forum* (2017): 4.

²⁹ Private conversation. Tokyo. February 20, 2018.

³⁰ Kimura Yusuke, *Sacred Cesium Ground*, trans. Doug Slaymaker (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 29–30.

³¹ This is also an echo of Koikari’s point, above.

³² Talk event, 2/21/19, Hon’ya B&B, Shimokitazawa, Tokyo. Suga Keijirō, her interlocuter at this event, extrapolates an important point: these responses highlight a problem in discussing “post-disaster literature” as only that which occurs after the events of 2011. This generation has lived through many disasters. They have lived through many of these questions before. Evacuations into concrete school buildings after a disaster reminded many, for example, of Tokyo government interventions following bombing raids in the Asia-Pacific war.

³³ Furukawa Hideo, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure: A Tale That Begins with Fukushima*, trans. Doug Slaymaker with Akiko Takenaka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 73.

³⁴ Gyūichirō is one of a pair of brothers who drive the action of Furukawa’s *Seikazoku* (The holy family, 2008). The two undertake a violent road trip throughout Tōhoku. In the action of *Uma tachi yo sore demo hikari wa muku de*, because of the disasters, Furukawa is again covering the same ground but in a different historical context. Characters from the 2008 novel appear in this 2011 work.

³⁵ Furukawa, *Horses*, 135.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Kimura Saeko suggests this may be one of the things Kanehara’s novel does: highlights the varieties of experience and response to the disasters. Kimura Saeko 木村朗子, *Sono go no shinsai go bungakuron* その後の震災後文学論 (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2018), 55.