

Horses, Horses, In the Innocence of Light 古川日出男『馬たちよ、それでも光は無垢で』より抜粋

Furukawa Hideo

Translated with an introduction by Doug Slaymaker

Introduction

Furukawa Hideo's novel-length *Umatachi yo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* (*Horses, Horses, In the Innocence of Light*) is compelling and important for all the reasons that it can be exasperating and demanding. It is driven by the triple disasters of 3.11-the earthquake, tsunami, and then nuclear meltdown in northeast Japan, of March 11, 2011. *Horses, Horses* first appeared in the journal *Shinchō* in July 2011 and in book form shortly thereafter; it captures the shock and disorientation of that time. It is many things, but it is primarily a 3.11 document. It is hard to overstate the effect of 3.11 in Japanese society; its resonances to 9/11 are multilayered: it is a Japanese disaster and also a world event; many, many things are now measured as "before" or "after;" it is a semiotic event comprised of endless, horrific, film loops and digital images. In that context, *Horses, Horses* has become one of the most important touchstones for the disasters: raw, sometimes confused, multilayered, overwhelmed and overwhelming, forceful, personal; just like, that is, the disasters and the responses of those caught up by it. It captures the sense that all the important things of a day before-all the major novels to be written, for example-were suddenly meaningless, ephemeral, and, somehow, devoid of life. And each aftershock is a reminder; as this narrator relates, with each new jolt manuscript pages are destined for the trash.



Furukawa Hideo

Horses, Horses does not fit neat genre categories. Furukawa's farming family was in Fukushima prefecture when the disasters struck, but he was not; on March 11, Furukawa, who is based in Tokyo, was in Kyoto gathering materials for a novel. So, this is not the tale of a Tohoku native who watched friends and neighbors, buildings and everything

else, washed out to sea only to then be haunted by real, but invisible, radiation. There are many of those. Rather, one of the important strains of this work is its recounting of the other common experience of contemporary Japan: living the surreal experience of unending images unfolding across innumerable screens; feeling part of scenes that should not be: ships on roads, boats on schools, waves surging through rice fields. An early image of the novel replicates this: eyes that should close but cannot, will not. The work is haunted by guilt and paralysis; it is driven by a real-time record of wading through to action and sensibility.

Horses, Horses recounts the shock of the disasters, made the more distressing to the Furukawa narrator who was not "at home" when they struck and therefore feels more keenly the tenuousness of communication and connections. Some calls got through and some did not; more to the point of the commonality of the experience, he also found himself unable to stop watching the scenes playing across the screens. Still more, there was again, the compulsion from outside, beckoning and demanding, that he "go there." This unspecified voice is consistent throughout: "go," "see," "write."

But the path leading to "there" is oblique, multidimensional, multivocal. *Horses, Horses* opens, for example, *in media res* of another novel; this marks only the first instance where Furukawa's major novel, *Seikazoku* (Holy Family), muscles its way into the narrative. That is, while *Horses, Horses* is a record of the disasters, it is other things as well. It is at times memoir, at times fiction, at times non-fiction essay. *Holy Family*, the *other* novel (as it is often referred to), is a sprawling work that traces the convoluted story line of two brothers as they move around the Tohoku region, the same region, that is, of Furukawa's family lineage and the 3.11 disasters, the "'North' plus 'East' [that] adds up to Tohoku," (p. 2). *Holy Family* was completed and in print years prior

to March 2011, but it was clearly still much on the mind of the author Furukawa. So insistent is it that the brothers of *Holy Family* appear as characters in *Horses, Horses*, they show up in the back seat of Furukawa's car as he makes his way north from Tokyo to Fukushima (in but one example of its narrative complexity). The brothers' story simultaneously traces contours of Japan's Northeast, of Tohoku, both in *Horses, Horses* and in *Holy Family*. This is one way that the atmosphere of *Horses, Horses* is thick with multiple voices and challenging perspectives. The work owes much to magical realism in its conflation of temporalities and voices, of time and space. It also reflects the fierce history of a rugged region in the shadow of the national, urban, controlling capital of Tokyo. These are among the ways that readers are led to think of William Faulkner or Nakagami Kenji. The brothers' story of disaster and mayhem, which overlaps with violent histories of the region, weaves depth into the experience of the 3.11 disasters and their relationship to this area.

Horses, Horses is also driven by the bloody tales the region has to tell of non-human actors, as the title leads us to expect. *Horses*, especially, but dogs, cows, and birds, like Furukawa's family, like the brothers of *Holy Family*, are all disrupted, all share histories and parallel stories, all have been pushed under or cut out. We encounter many of these in the opening scene: humans, the narrator, the presence of extraterrestrials, the brothers from *The Holy Family* novel, the sense of place signified by Tohoku. Likewise, at the outset we encounter the concern for dates and calendars, for ancient tales, for alternate tellings; concern, that is, for ownership of one's own history and narrative.

The fact that all of the electric output from the Fukushima Nuclear plant was destined for Tokyo, indeed, that the power plant is administered not by any local entity but by Tokyo Electric Power Company, which is to say,

that the irrevocable changes that reach into every aspect of living beings are solely by and for Tokyo, becomes a touchstone rooting the entire work. It drives the sense of injustice, it drives the ferreting out of stories; those stories then congeal to form *Horses, Horses*. For example, not just the histories of humans, but the histories of horses: horses are historical actors here; horses are constituent of the place names of this affected region; horses are evacuated following the disasters; horses are traumatized; horses are in temporary shelters. As are humans. The Furukawa narrator's travel unearths the history of horses in community, and of horses being slaughtered at the whims of central governmental powers across the centuries. Again, of course, just like humans. The disasters of 3.11, and the Furukawa narrator's traveling through the region in the aftermath, become the stimulus for those narratives. This adds an entirely different narrative line to the tale; it is another of the ways that this is much more than a 3.11 narrative; it is this complexity and richness that make it more than a 3.11 document. **DS**

An older brother questions his younger brother. He wants to know,

--What if there were this extraterrestrial, and the extraterrestrial is riding in a UFO, and this UFO were outfitted with a stereo system; what kind of music would you have the extraterrestrial play? Flying through the air, there, what would you want him to listen to?

Not a question the younger brother can answer, so he asks something else.

--What if there were this extraterrestrial, and they are in their UFO, and you could pick just one Beatles song for them to listen to, what would you pick?

Younger brother answers immediately: "Strawberry Fields Forever;" the answer

suggests no other possibility.

"Strawberry Fields": the name of an orphanage that really existed there in Liverpool, the harbor town that looks out on the Irish Sea. An orphans' song. A song of the orphans maybe, certainly for the orphans.

An open atlas brought the scene to mind. The scene calls up many related emotions. Not a map of England. It had nothing to do with England, or even Europe, nor North America. It is a 1:140,000 scale map of a place labeled "Nihonmatsu." The city of Nihonmatsu occupies the center. But I wasn't looking at the center of the map but up to the north and east. In the upper right hand corner of the open page, along route 114, you can find the "UFO Friendship Center." Everyone who lives there calls route 114 the "Tomioka Highway." There is a "UFO road" close to the UFO Friendship Center complete with statues of extraterrestrials, according to the explanation in red letters. I read the whole thing. My eyes stopped there and I read place name, explanation, all of it. That's what called up the scene. The scene of the two brothers. Right then, seemed like the most natural thing in the world, I knew I had to go there. The next instant, I rejected such a decision. What was I hoping for? What I hoped for in that instant was for the statues of the extraterrestrials to be toppled, to be crushed, reduced to shards scattered and broken across the landscape. Wanted them pulverized rather than not pulverized. I closed the atlas.

The book closed with a sharp slap.

Closed with a softer rustle like the flapping of a great bird's wings.

I didn't even make sure: the UFO Friendship Center might be within the Fukushima city limits, or maybe it was Kawamata City, or maybe some other city. Anyhow, North of Nihonmatsu, then East.

East, then North. I can't forget that original scene. I am unable to forget it. Two brothers. Younger brother responds to the elder without hesitation. "Strawberry Fields Forever." Once the song starts in your head, it won't stop. I hear it now. Maybe it never will. "Forever." It's a scene from a novel. And I'm the author of the novel.

"North" plus "east" adds up to Tohoku, as in Northeast Japan.

There's the voice again. It overlaps with the song. A clear command: "Go there."

Eyes must be closeable. It's a characteristic of sight. It's what fundamentally sets it apart from hearing. Eardrums have no lids. But retinas are outfitted with eyelids. So it should be easy; you'd think, but I can't do it. I keep staring at the information on the television; now the surface of my eyeballs is totally dried out. More like the dam has burst, actually. Teardrops fall. They are dripping like rain. How many times can it occur in an hour? Frequency can't be ascertained. "One hour," the unit of measurement disappears. Not 24 of them in a day. Commercials have disappeared from the TV. Delimiters disappeared. Things that can not happen in the mere span of one day are happening, expanding-EXPANDING, PROLIFERATING, ON AND ON. The only phrase I can think of that captures the experience: "time is extinguished." More concretely, consciousness of the date on the calendar, the day of the week, has collapsed. I think I can put a name on it: "Spirited Away." Abducted by spirits. When a person is spirited away seven days are experienced as half a year; three months feel like a matter of seconds. Time can't be accounted for, it's impossible to measure. I wrote about being "spirited away" in a novel. You know which novel, *that* novel.

Here's another scene. It's also related to a Beatles song.

The younger brother is asking the older: "The one where the gull cries, what song is that? You know, the one where you hear the sea birds in the intro, which one is that?" Older brother has an answer: "Tomorrow Never Knows." They used a tape loop so that the psychedelic song has an effect that sounds like sea gulls. Both of them know about this, about these sea gulls-known as "Sea cats," actually-that sound like meowing cats, with their breeding ground up on the coast of Sanriku. They know all about it. And both of them are remembering the time they set off for the harbor town of Miyako up there in Iwate Prefecture. Who knows why, but the younger brother remembers only the fierce birds, the kites, that gathered there. "In Miyako," he starts to say to the older brother, but older brother cuts him off, "Nope, we also saw the gull-like birds they call sea cats."

They went straight through Miyako.

It was just a road taking them on through to the next prefecture.

They were on their way up to the northern provinces, to Tohoku.

I passed through there too. Just like the brothers, I saw Miyako, and also travelled up north past the Sanriku coast, and stayed one night in some budget hotel. Basically just to be able to describe that scene. That scene with the two brothers. I still remember all those birds, black kites, nothing if not fierce. Was like they owned the town. But I am staring at on the TV, watching the news, and *that* Miyako is not to be seen. The town has disappeared. The elevated roadway there is probably Route 45. I have a vague memory of it being laid out like that. Everyone up there called Route 45 "The Beach Road." I wonder if there is anything else to recognize. I opened the atlas again. I run my eyes down the coastline. I wonder if the line on the map is still true to the actual coastline. Impossible. Wondering about things in Jōdogahama? Geez, I feel like I have been cursed by that name: jōdo? As in "The Pure

Land"? Where's the heaven in that?

That place seems far away now.

Infinitely far, I'm thinking now. I am remembering the scene but my brain won't call up the melody for "Tomorrow Never Knows." It continues, "Forever," on repeat. "Strawberry Fields" brings to mind the sea breeze. I remember the Miyako harbor and the Hei River. This all feels wrong.

I close the atlas with my finger between the pages.

Closes with just a whimper of a sound. Iwate prefecture, Miyagi prefecture to the south of that, south of that Fukushima prefecture. Even without the map one knows the shore continues, on and on. I can't get the two brothers out of my mind. On and on; can't. I gave animal names to the two of them. The novelist who gave them those names was, well, me. They have *inu*-dog-in their last names, and their first names? One is *ushi*-cow-and the other is *hitsuji*-sheep.

I experienced one day "like" it was a week. Or three days that "felt like" a month. This is "spirited away" time. I was not the only one that lost all sense of days of the week, I was not the only one for whom the dates of the calendar disappeared. (Everyone I was talking with seemed to be experiencing the same thing.) Meantime, everyone living outside the places deemed a "disaster zone" was able to escape the "spirited away" time; that includes me. At the end of the ongoing and repeated announcements about the situation that "exceeds all expectations," we entered a phase more of entropy than progress. Not a particularly exciting conclusion. At that point I cancelled two projects. Given that I am a novelist, my work is writing novels. One project was a monthly serialization, the other was a long novel that had already been commissioned and scheduled for production. The parts of it were written but needed arranging.

But the answer was clear. No way I could write.

Right before picking up my pen it came to me. For as long as I can remember, and without giving it any thought, I had not taken a break from writing. For these many years there has not been a single day in which I did not write. I have no concept of a day off. Stop and think about it: I have been averaging three novels a year for a long time. And even in the periods you might point out that I only produced one volume, that volume was five or six times as long as any normal novel. Given the sheer volume of the thing it was impossible to simply refer to it as a "long novel." I called it a "mega novel."

But why did I continue writing like this? An internal necessity, drive, compulsion, relentless.

That's how it was. That's the only way to express it, given that I just cancelled two projects. Fiction, or anything that requires planning and then writing was out of the question. I couldn't write. I couldn't see my way to writing. OK, not exactly unable to write. I experimented with some short things. Even while locked away in the midst of the "spirited away" time, if requests came in, I would write pieces for magazines. I had to be engaged to do it so I gave it what I had and dredged up memories from deep within. I never thought that literature is useless. No doubts about that. The problems came with genre. If prose was requested, then what kind of prose? In what style? For what imagined readership? All these years I feel like I have been writing novels for anybody, everybody. No imagined reader in mind. That approach was no longer going to cut it.

I began writing this essay on April 11, 2011. I was about 10 pages in when there was an aftershock off the coast of Fukushima. Just over magnitude 6.

Every time there was a strong aftershock, I

would revise.

The aftershocks left no options. A clear voice: "revise completely and thoroughly."

Same voice as that earlier voice that said: "Go There." So I followed the voice, waited for some things to fall into place, and started writing this. In a jumbled mess with no obvious way out, extreme measures become necessary. So I devised one. I started on March 11, 2011; a month passed, I spent it thinking. I wrote down the dates and started thinking. The first dates I used were from the Western calendar. The western calendar seems the most normal way of starting. Maybe because the damage was global in scope. The international support was encouraging (to all of us Japanese, whether inside or outside the damaged area). But I had written a novel that never once referenced the Western calendar. I had written this mega-novel that only used the Imperial reign years to mark dates. It's that one, that mega-novel. Even though it looked like an historical novel, for much of it I only used the imperial reign years. The publication date of the novel itself was recorded with the reign name: Heisei 20. The reason will be obvious: the first year of the Meiji era inaugurated a new system of assigning one reign name per emperor. In order to keep up a continual reference to the Emperor system I avoided using the Western calendar in the tale. At that time the voice commanded complete expulsion. Now, of course, that doesn't mean 100% disregard of the beginning of the Christian Era. Within that novel I talked about the Bible; from the beginning I referenced Christ's family tree, and kept it up obsessively. Even the title-"The Holy Family"-of the novel touches on it. Christianity, down to the details of Christ's family tree. The origin of that mega-novel *The Holy Family* comes from the painting with that name that is so important in Christian art.

Wait: I unconsciously capitalized those two words, written here in English: Holy Family.

Never noticed that before: the two letters standing out at the beginning of the words resonate with my own name, are my initials. There's a surprise. Whatever; that doesn't matter.

If the Bible gives birth to lineages and gives birth to myths, what are the comparable "Holy writings" of Japan? The *Kojiki* maybe? The first part of it consists of myths, the latter part of imperial lineages. In that sense it is Japan's "Bible." In that mega-novel *The Holy Family* I only briefly touch on the early Japanese texts like the *Kojiki* and *Nihonshoki*. I really don't touch on the *Kojiki* at all. Know why? Because the *Kojiki* is about bringing to light the origins of the Japanese nation and I was trying to describe the areas of Japan it didn't touch on. *The Holy Family* is a novel about the six prefectures that comprise the Tohoku region of Northeast Japan. *The Holy Family* has those two brothers as main characters. While dozens of characters play main roles, those two are at the center.

An older brother and a younger. A family name that contains the character for "dog"; one first name with a cow, the other with a sheep. So many different scenes and events.

[...]

There are two main characters in *The Holy Family* mega-novel, the older brother and the younger brother. [...] The name of the eldest brother who appears in *The Holy Family* is Gyūichirō, with those characters for "cow" and "first born." The family name is Inuzuka, with one character for dogs and one for burial mounds. A grave for dogs.

Another major aftershock; today's manuscript with half a day's writing goes into the trash. The Earthquake Early Warning system announced it as "In the Hamadōri section of Fukushima Prefecture, strongest tremors at six plus on the seismic intensity scale." I shuddered. In Northern Ibaraki it was only a

weak five on the scale. In Iwaki, four. But what does it mean to feel relieved at a time like that? A weak five is still pretty powerful. Do we really need grow accustomed to this, and find no threat in anything lower than six? Hard to imagine.

For the past three days the hypocenter of practically all the tremors has been on the prefectural border of Fukushima and Ibaraki. Deep underground there.

Now that I have remembered, or become newly cognizant of the dates, if I am going to put them in I might as well go the whole way. And if that is the case, I am going to try a rewrite of that manuscript that I threw away. But I'm going to ignore the chronology. I'm going to work backwards and work against the flow. I think there was a small event in Kyoto on Sunday April 10. There was a charity event for the disaster although no one was calling it "charity." I received information about it on April 1. Somebody had forwarded me the email because the original sender-the owner of a bookstore in Kyoto's Sakyo ward-didn't have my address. Three years earlier-that would be fall of 2008-there had been a release party for *The Holy Family* there. We had had dinner together. A young guy. He said he had read pronouncements that I had written and published in a guest column for the local readership of the *Kyoto Shinbun*. He latched on to one of the phrases there and decided to host an event. "Using imagination for good" was the phrase. Some comments from me were printed in the *Kyoto Shinbun* of March 16. The comments had been sent via the press agency. I wrote back directly to the bookshop owner. I wanted to express my thanks.

To move back two Sundays prior to that April 10, to March 27, I participated in an event in Tokyo. The organizer wrote prose. My invitation to participate came from a poet and essayist who writes in a way that gets beyond the limits of "Japanese," he is always writing in

ways that try to push those boundaries. The event was scheduled for Tokyo, in Shibuya, a small club, the kind they call a "live spot." I was to read. Since the line-up was clearly organized around the poets I chose one of my texts that could pass as poetry. I had to read in a voice, and from a text, that could sound *as though* it was being sent to Tohoku. But, from what I had written in the past, what words would pass as appropriate in this situation? So, it seemed obvious, it could only be a section from *The Holy Family* (but it took two full days to come to that conclusion). I pulled out a section, something like a monologue, in Tohoko dialect. I thought to read it, but like a remix. But no way I would read an episode including humans. Not if I did anything at all. So I chose an episode about horses. It was a tale I pulled from an area without a name in Iwate prefecture where they used to abandon old horses. I chose the story of a now-dead mare, a horse with no name, from that area. This was Shōwa 21-that's 1946 in Western calendar. 1946, of course, is the year following the defeat in war. So, a tale about a horse in Tohoku and *that* Japan-the Japanese nation-state. I was going to read, certainly try to read, of pain that transcended time and space. I was confident I could read in a way to make it work. I trusted that the horse language, at least, was lodged somewhere within me.

The event had two parts.

My reading took place in the first half. I was backstage during the intermission.

A girl came to see me. She had my book in hand. She looked to me to be in her late teens; I checked with one of the assistants later who confirmed that she was a high school student. She wanted me to sign her book, which I was happy to do. We exchanged a few words, "I came from Sōma," she said. And then I understood: she was a refugee. That made her a refugee from the Pacific coast of Fukushima Prefecture, from the disaster area, from the

coastal part, from Hamadōri. And, of course, in Sōma there are horses-the place name holds horses within it: Sō points to a long history, to physiognomy, and *ma* is the character for horse. There are, in fact, horses there. "I see." That was all I could get out at first. I tripped over my tongue again, but finally said, "I will go to Sōma." Which meant, "I want to see it."

Her response was immediate, "Please come and see for yourself."

This takes us back to two Sundays prior to March 27. On March 13 I received a written request from the press agency. Of course, I was fully wrapped up within the "spirited away" time, and even though dates and days had been hijacked, if I go back over it now I can get it in order enough to talk about it. I will lay it out carefully. This is now about 40 hours after the monster tremors. And then an offer comes to write something, "a message for the victims" they wanted. I had been following the *development* of events at the Fukushima Number 1 nuclear plant, but I didn't hesitate in response. I answered reflexively, immediately. "I'll write," I said. I had no idea that it would be sent off to the *Kyoto Shinbun* newspaper.

One day before that, Saturday.

And the day before that, Friday.

I was in Kyoto. On March 11, 2011 I was in Kyoto; between 2-3 in the afternoon I was in Sakyo ward, gathering materials. I had arrived in Kyoto the night before. That was in order to gather material for the novel. [...] Title to be *Dogmother*. Its release was nearly finalized. The setting for the novel was Kyoto, limited to the center of Kyoto. During the last three years I probably had been to Kyoto twenty times to gather materials. And why Kyoto? Because the *historical* Japanese state is located there. To find a different Japan, one with capital-city kinds of elements, one looks to Tokyo. Or one can look to Tohoku for a region, a symbol, of a different kind of *historical* Japan. I had written

about Tohoku in *The Holy Family*. I was always writing things about Tokyo. Thus, I had to write about Kyoto in *Dogmother*. And, of course, since the contents touch on the "originary documents" of Japan I mentioned before-the *Kojiki*-which is directly related to it even though it is not really a main part of the novel *Godstar*, I have the Meiji emperor (or, at least, someone who has a memory of him) appear.

So, dogmother. I had spent all my energy in 2011 and staked everything on *that*. So, if I couldn't get to a place where I completed something I was satisfied with, well, then I would have to chuck this novelist business out the window.

So that's the state I was in when I was in Kyoto on March 11. The fact is that this research trip was originally planned for two days later, on March 13. I was going to leave Tokyo late evening on that Sunday. But K, that young friend of mine, and the band that he was front man for, and their CD release party, which eventually ended up being moved to April 9 had been scheduled for the 13th-March 13th-so I had already changed my plans and moved the trip back. I figured I would get back to Tokyo in time, no problem.

Even in Kyoto there was quite a bit of shaking.

Didn't know they had such *long ones* here in Western Japan, I thought to myself. Which took me back to the great Hanshin earthquake of 1995. Tohoku never entered my mind, of course.

At 5:00 or so I was on the platform of the Kyoto Karasuma subway. I noticed people, then more people, with what looked like a newspaper extra in their hands, with the dancing headline. White letters on black background. "Tohoku," it read. "Deep in the Pacific Ocean. Magnitude 8.8. Numerous large Tsunami."

Panic. I called my parents' house. Used a public phone. I got through. The next day I wouldn't

have been able to get through. The magnitude was recalibrated at 9.0 two days later. In my hotel room I couldn't take my eyes from the news on the television. That's when that period of steady gazing began. That period relates directly to the "spirited away time." Is tied right to it.

[...]

So, think about a flammable liquid. A tank of liquefied petroleum explodes at an oil refinery and shoots off orange flames. Numerous white hot pillars of flame. How do you count pillars of flame? One "pillar," two "pillars"? Or, think about a power outage that extends well beyond the powers of imagination. Reports say 7 million homes affected. One can only visualize it as complete blackness. Or, imagine flooded airport runways; or, think about Shinkansen trains that have run off their tracks. The birds-eye view images come streaming in one after the other. There are on the screen. Or, imagine a tsunami that floods water up into all the rivers. From the coasts, images that recreate it over and over again. There are muddy brown currents, which in their height (and maybe in their sheer speed) swallow up untold vehicles. Moving through there with quick violence. Tail ends of cars being smacked around. Can't really think of them as swimming. Or, think of mud slides and how many people, how many tens of people, buried alive, not clear how many people. Hundreds of people, no doubt. Thousands of people, washed away. Or, think about building roofs, and all the people up there looking to be rescued. All this together is being reported at ten thousand people. So, think about night, power outage at night in the residential neighborhoods and the flames are rising higher, this hellish inferno casts off an orange color different from the flames of the liquid petroleum refinery. The petroleum refinery in Chiba prefecture different from the refinery in Miyagi prefecture. Maybe it is Miyagi. The heavy oil flows from the storage tank and is burning down the streets. So think

of an earthquake that registers 6 on the scale, originating in Nagano prefecture. Nagano? The news people say that it is not clear if they are aftershocks or not. So, another massive earthquake? I keep hearing this phrase, keeping seeing the phrase "unprecedented domestic something-something", over and over, on screens. There is a TV in the room. Even though the lights are surely on, it's dark. It's now the middle of the night so obviously we have started a new day on the calendar, but I sensed the beginning of the disappearance of dates. I should have been sleeping but I wasn't. The only sleep is REM sleep; continual dreams. My eyes are fixed on the tv screen. And then open the eyelids, and-no surprise-there's the screen again. The realm of the living, so it seems to me. The *over there* on the television is the living realm whereas I, me in particular, have passed over. On to the side of the unreal. I am in no position to ask myself questions but I ask myself anyway: why am I not among the victims? All of those people *over there* are swallowed by death, touched and caressed by the god of death, but me? How did I get off not dying? Offenses. To overdo the description, guilty conscience. Why is it that all those people *over there* had to be the victims?

Days have begun disappearing, but it's morning. The next morning has arrived. The main Tokaidō Shinkansen has started operations again, back on track. I return to Tokyo. Tokyo had also been shaken. So, if on March 11 I had been in Tokyo, at that time, as originally planned, I would be considering myself as one of the disaster victims. Would have been there for the tremors, a disaster victim, one of the affected. But I was in Kyoto. Flung back from *over there*. Nothing but the information on the television.

Can I claim to be without fault? Time to record the reasons for this nonchalance.

The voice.

Then, concentric circles. At first, an order for

everyone within a 3 kilometer radius of the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power plant to evacuate; then, an order requiring everyone within a 10 kilometer radius to remain indoors. Before long the evacuation order was extended out to 10 kilometers. An evacuation order was also mandated for everyone within a 10 kilometers radius of Fukushima Daini nuclear power plant; at the same time the evacuation zone was extended to 20 kilometers around Fukushima Daiichi. Two sets of concentric circles. In places they overlap. But, before long, a 30 kilometer radius circle was added circling Fukushima Daiichi inside which was required "internal refuge." This "big circle" looked like the corona around a sun. Around Daini was the "small circle." Subordinated to that "Big Circle" was a concentric core circle which made the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant look like the sun. Land of the Sun. The new country of Japan.

The concentric circles, all of them, lost their shapes, collapsed. Already on April 11 it was announced that they would be done away with, "someday."

"But still," I thought to myself. This just prior to April 11 while I remained wrapped up inside the "spirited away time." What's with naming this whole thing after a nuclear power plant? Is there really any good reason to refer to the whole thing by the name of a prefecture that just happened to begin with "F"? This gave rise to concentric circles designed to deal with the radioactivity; while these two circles, the big one and the small one, vie with each other they are actually collapsed into one big circle, in result the second "Land of the sun", the new Japan, that was birthed from this, is lumped together by name and geography with "Fukushima." The entire world associates it with this place. It became clear to me again. Fukushima Prefecture was being locked down; no, let's be precise: it was being blockaded.

But that makes no sense. Fukushima Daiichi

power plant is the property of Tokyo Electric Power Company. The plant is in Fukushima Prefecture so should be under the jurisdiction of Tohoku Electric Company. Isn't it within the jurisdiction of the Tohoku electric company? Just makes no sense. And then I get these reports: 1/3 of Tokyo's electric power is supplied by Fukushima prefecture. Or maybe it was that "that 1/3 of Tokyo Electric Company's electricity" came from there. No need to track down the precise numbers here, because this all makes the point of the situation clearer than the details. I mean, really. Circles, and concentric circles. FUKUSHIMA-no matter how you spell it-was being locked out. People have been chased outside those circles, but it is all such an empty fiction. "Beyond the prefectural border?" Can one truly escape by leaving the prefecture?

I put my hand on those circles.

On the screen streaming the news.

I can feel the rings. They speak to me. "Go." I saw myself in the bathroom mirror, half of the eyebrows on the right side had disappeared, clearly I had been unconsciously plucking them out. There I was, pale. "My god," I thought, "how stressed have I been?" "What day is it? What day of the week?" "Go." There was the voice. "You must go there." "Inside the concentric circles."

These feelings, what are they exactly?

All the people have been chased away. The towns have been abandoned. All the dogs and cats, and cows, and the horses too. There is not even any effort made to dispose of the dead bodies. All abandoned.

I am compelled to stand in that place, but what is driving me like this? An analysis looks like this: it was me that felt the need to expose myself to radiation, it is me alone exposing myself to this violence. I get that. It was a suicide wish. I am surprised that such an urge

remains within me. I dealt with that in my twenties, but it had flickered out by 27 or 28. By 27 or 28 I had decided on another thing. Can't say now what exactly, but I can sketch it out. Self pity, which is, in the end, a despising of other people, and the whole world. But first, to cast off hatred. That's enough of this talk.

[...]

Now, given such a declaration, some questions I must train on myself:

What of *The Holy Family*?

Why did I write a novel of the six prefectures of Tohoku, of Northeast Japan?

And then, why such a novel that shuts-in, blockades, those six prefectures?

I felt like an orphan. But why? It's not like I was actually an orphan.

I was born inland in the Nakadōri section of Fukushima, not along the coast, over in Hamadōri, over by the Pacific ocean; Hamadōri is now the central core of the concentric circles. And more, I was one of those who left town. Never had any intention of staying in the old home area. Way I remember it, that choice was already closed off in third or fourth grade. This "leaving" had nothing to do with affection or hatred. Just this feeling that that area-around Kōriyama, Fukushima prefecture-didn't need me; had no use for me. This sense, and the sense that Fukushima itself had been "snatched away", something there, but maybe not, something different there. Can anyone explain how, or the reasons why, the people that "remained" there were polluted in this way? A voice. "Go." "Get yourself radiated." Or just Go, See. I was born in the central Nakadōri section of Fukushima prefecture. Now I must go to the ocean side, the Hamadōri, section.

But how am I going to do this when it is so painful?

[...]

[I ran into one of my editors at a gallery performance.] "I want to get into Fukushima. Over to the Hamadōri section of Fukushima. Will Shinchō publishing underwrite this for me?"

"Sure," he responded right back. "I will arrange it," he said. "And I want to go too," he added.

[...]

We took off in the middle of the night. Four of us stuffed into a small car with a license plate from Kashiwa, in Chiba. A rental car. Not me, but for the people from Shinchō publishing this was just a continuation of the evening. For me, following 1 or 2 hours of sleep, it was morning. So the ideas that come in the early morning hours and the kind of topics that get passed around in the middle of the night were all mixed together. Nonetheless, outside the window it was nighttime, clearly it was the middle of the night; inside the car the screen of the car navigation system was lit up. Up on the dashboard. This was no "spirited away time" but there were time slippages. Time for us-the four of us-began to mix in a 3:1 ratio, and the days of the calendar too were beginning to slip. S was driving, in the passenger seat with an open map was another S-young S-while Y and I were gathered in the back seat. We left Tokyo and headed out on the highway. The route was entirely overland so we got on the Tohoku expressway. I didn't really expect the roads to be open all the way to Fukushima. But they were, from Saitama Prefecture, way up to the northern part of Fukushima. I was quite sure that for some time now all but emergency vehicles were being prevented from passing. But many places, wherever they could, had already returned to normal operations. We pulled into a service area somewhere in Tochigi Prefecture. Filled the car with gas. I was surprised to hear from S when he told me that it looked like gasoline was going to be available when we got there. There was a cat at that

Service Area. A female cat. A fat one. Y was petting it on the head. It felt to me that if the cat was fat the area must be safe. I had packed a bunch of fish sausages to feed to animals. That, along with other stuff in the luggage, like cotton work gloves, rain ponchos, and liters of tap water that I had run through a water purifier and put into empty plastic bottles. In the lavatory at the service area were notices about the power outages scheduled to take place. But of course: all through the Kanto area were these scheduled power outages. I saw how electric conservation reached into everything, darkened all sorts of areas, including these expressway facilities and service roads. I told myself not to get depressed about that. Eventually, dawn. As this little car with a Kashiwa license is running down the highway it was bathed in day's first light, directly from the side, from the east. "There it is," I thought, "the sun is out." For me it was the second morning (second for *this day*). Next stop was the Abukuma Service area. White breath in the air. 5:44 in the morning. Even with the slippage of days the hours were exact. Seemed to me just like flying overseas' jetlag. And seeing the white of our breath, it felt exactly like winter. "Just like an early daybreak in winter," I thought. But this was early April. "Beginning of the fiscal year," stern note to self: can't be late.

Bright rays of light-shooting rays of the sun-bounced off of every surface of the service area, the metal surfaces of walls and pillars, the glass of the windows. Flying off at crazy angles.

Off at the edge of the parking area I discovered an old stele. It was a replica (had to be) of the ancient Shirakawa barrier gate, very impressively written, "This way to enter Michinoku." That brought a wry smile; at the same time, a floaty feeling. Where are we? Where is this?

We had entered the Fukushima prefectural [...]

limits.

[...]

We began to see trucks on the road, more and more of them, with signs announcing that they were disaster aid vehicles. Young S was driving. National Route 115, which crossed through the Abukuma plain, was known in this region as Nakamura Highway. We also began to see middle school students bicycling to school. One third of them were without facemasks, which led me to feel a sense of normalcy. A strange trip. Feeling like brain overload. It was now a little past 8 in the morning. A sign at the side of the road advertised the famous milk from this village. Made me think of cows, and the *Ushi* of my story. From there we entered the heart of Sōma city, this part of the city is known as Nakamura. That's the same Nakamura as the Nakamura Highway. The street lamps were designed with horse hooves and horses. Made me think of horses, and the *Uma* of my story. In Sōma, with horses.

I had already decided we would stop at the convenience store. It was necessary for me. I had a duty and an obligation as the author of *The Holy Family*. This was where the story of those two brothers ended. But I passed up the shops in Sōma. We now turned onto Route 6. We were now there. The JR Jōban train lines runs alongside the national highway. We had arrived at the Pacific coast. I told S to keep heading north out of the city to a place still within Sōma County, called Shinchimachi. Y was looking at the map. Shinmachi is right on the border with Miyagi prefecture. Fukushima prefecture ends there.

We parked the car at a convenience store in Shinchimachi.

We made our way back to Sōma city. We pulled into a gas station. Filled the car with gas.

[...]

We drove into the center of the city, then to Baryō park, which includes the Nakamura castle area and the Nakamura Shrine grounds. More than ten of the stone lanterns lining the main approach had toppled.

The shrine's torii gate comes into view. No surprise in that; I knew it was going to be there of course. No apparent damage. No torii were damaged. Rather than the usual lion-dogs, statues of sacred horses stood at the entrance. A single pair. I expected that too. I had seen many horse statues like this up in the north, on the Tsugaru peninsula in Aomori Prefecture. I had also seen lots on the shrine grounds over on the Eastern side of Iwate prefecture when I had visited those shrines to gather material for *The Holy Family*.

What I didn't expect was the pony, off to the right hand side, the "sacred horse of the shrine" according to the sign. By himself, brown and white, inside a small corral. Smaller than a thoroughbred. Waiting, apparently, for someone. Somebody, anybody, anyone at all.

The giant earthquake had also destroyed stone bridges. So there were parts of the shrine grounds one couldn't get to. Ironical: these sacred precincts were now truly off-limits. Trucks for "transportation of race horses" were parked there. Which means horses had been brought to this area. I felt their presence anew. I nodded a goodbye to the pony and made my way to another area of the shrine grounds.

There were actually multiple shrines in the area. It was not clear which was the Sōma shrine, which the Nakamura Shrine, which the Sōma Nakamura shrine. I couldn't tell. We climbed up the hill. There was a horse ground there, and a sign announcing it as the "horse pasture."

And so, the ancient Sōma-the name seems to mean something like "reader of horse physiognomy"- includes the precincts which had been governed by the Sōma clan deities

that the shrines commemorate, and is therefore broader than the area indicated by the cities, towns, and villages brought together under regional restructuring; the area originally known as Sōma also encompasses the region that is well known for its *Nomaoi* horse-racing festival. The festival is jointly hosted by three shrines. Two of those shrines are in the towns formerly known as Haramachi and Odaka, which were among the towns and villages that were merged to make up Minami Sōma in 2006. The festival received and national designation (by the nation of Japan) as an "important intangible folk cultural asset." So, I knew I would find horses. I knew they would be here, in this region.

Nonetheless, I didn't expect these sorts of horses: refugee horses, horses that had been driven out by the tsunami, injured horses. Some were in the pasture, some were in stables. The stables were being managed by an NPO. Young S had heard that volunteers were taking care of the horses. It realized it later, but the horses being cared for here had been temporarily evacuated to a separate prefecture, a forced immigration, perhaps a step towards becoming permanent evacuees. Outside Fukushima prefecture. At that time I was not really listening to young S's explanations. I just couldn't. I was stroking the muzzle of a horse. The long area of the nose between the eyes. The horse pasture itself had been divided into two areas, one large and one small, with one horse in each area. Both horses were thin. From the outset I petted the single horse in the small enclosure; he had lost almost all of the hair on one side.

Hair loss. Easy to deduce that this was a symptom of stress.

From fear, I assume.

There was hair there on its muzzle and head. And, of course, hair on most of its body, and bangs, but also transparent hairs sticking out from its chin, sticking out like cat whiskers.

Ten or so. I didn't know that horses had hair like that, like whiskers. The horse suddenly turned its attention to eating grass. Engrossed, completely. I guess it's grass, subsistence, anyway, the green stuff they eat. Seems like I should know; feels like an unforgiveable oversight. All I can say is that it was "food." Sounds come from the horse's mouth in rhythm with its chewing, and the whiskers were all buried in its food.

Over on the large fenced-in side of the pasture, the single horse was looking at me. As the three others approached, he remained tight against the fence and stretched his head over the top to try and get close to us.

I assume he was frightened.

I looked down at his feet. I could see that it was not using all the area allotted to him. He stayed in one space, the area right near the entrance, the space, that is, where he could be petted, where he could be in contact with those who came to visit. Back and forth, endlessly, in the confined space of no more than two meters, kicking up the ground with his hooves.

I stroked the horse, but with no real idea of where, or how, I could stroke a horse in a way that might convey a true sense of affection and care. I had seen the actions of riders congratulating their horses when they won a race, and I was trying something similar, but the result was meaningless failure. I could not impart even the smallest amount of comfort.

Those horses with bared front teeth, striking how big, and hard, are those teeth.

All this stuff: their taking in sea water, in the tsunami.

And still being rattled by the aftershocks rolling through.

No way to explain what's going on to them.

The impossibility, of everything

The exhaustion, that remained in the palm of my hand.

The horses in the stables had painful looking wounds. The stable was often empty of humans. Two cats were in residence, one of which was sleeping peacefully. Y had one of them in his arms and was petting it. Photos hanging on the walls showed how closely the cats and the horses lived together. They told of how rich was this shared life, with cats on the backs of horses, shots of them as close friends. Y comforted the cat which would go on to comfort the horses. I hope to see them healed. I wish I had access to horse language.

[...]

I wanted to explain to the horses that the radiation in the air is impossible to see, but it can't be done. No way to tell them how, on this clear day, in the middle of the day, that there is invisible matter in the air sending out invisible particles, coming out of the sky right now. The light, being light, is invisible. Even on such a bright clear day. Precisely because it is such a bright clear day.

When the four of us turned to leave, the horses whinnied.

[...]

April 17. Early in the morning I received an email message from Y with an internet videolink. In his message he pointed out that this was filmed while we had been close to the Fukushima nuclear plant and that we were very likely in this very place. The uploaded video was titled "Special Report: Dogs and cows in the lawless area of the nuclear evacuation zone."

I hit play.

Inu and *ushi*; dogs and cows. They were there.

WTF.

Like they had been let loose. Abandoned. Like they had banded together on the edge of survival, after all the humans had evacuated to other places. The humans had fled.

Even so, it is dogs and cows. Doesn't that comprise the name of the oldest brother?

Time to go back home. I can only write if I go back. The four of us got in the car, left Baryō park again, putting distance between us and the horses in the pastures and stables. Another look at the streets of Sōma city. Something like a camp for the Self-Defense forces had been constructed. There were still scars from the earthquake. Maybe from the original quake, maybe from aftershocks. I wanted to go to a supermarket. Not some convenience store, but the supermarket that I think was the biggest in Sōma. I had heard that this chain, with many stores throughout Fukushima Prefecture, and with stores in Miyagi, Yamagata, Tochigi, and Ibaragi Prefectures as well, that had just gotten financing through one of the major national corporations. More to the point, the stores had started in my city, in Kōriyama. So, whenever we talked about supermarkets, *that* was the one we meant. We parked our car with its Kashiwa license plates on the rooftop parking garage and headed into the store. First, down the stairs—the elevators weren't running. We passed a family on the stairs, headed the opposite direction; the kids had masks. I guess for kids it's like Spring break. Actually, if schools had been open like in a normal year, this would have been Spring break, but who knows. So, even though it was lunchtime on a weekday, the store was pretty busy; it was not "packed" or anything but neither did it feel like the middle of a crisis. Nothing to make one feel that way. We were looking to see how well the different shelves were stocked, checking the different sections, and while we were in no position to judge whether it was appropriate to call it well-stocked or not, the shelves certainly

didn't seem empty either. And yet, there were definite holes: like the cases for local produce. Pictures of local farmers were proudly displayed, and the signs with write-ups about them were in abundance, but there was no *product*, none of their vegetables, zero, nada, not a stalk, not a bulb. The farms' addresses listed were almost all from Minami Sōma: still within that largest of concentric circles, but still outside the 20 kilometers radius. Minami Sōma is definitely *outside* that circle, right? The area that used to be Haramachi? There were other sections, here and there, empty of items. And while it seemed totally strange and unnatural, it didn't exactly take the "super" out of the "market," either. Nor did it seem to disrupt the equilibrium of the customers. But still, more than half of them were wearing masks, adults included, which was hard to miss, all the more because it now seemed to be a totally normal thing, and yet, still, with all those *things* that were missing from the shelves, this *thing* just seemed so obvious. I may be over-reacting. Maybe the masks are only for all the pollen that is in the air every spring. Possible, I guess, maybe.

But was Sōma always like this?

Not likely.

It seemed so calm. I turned to S: "It feels so calm around here."

"Yep, like nothing unusual around here," he said.

Surprise. Exactly right, I thought. "Calm" is not what this is. Something different from that. It is "nothing unusual." It had obviously been set up that way: If we can't do anything anyway, what are we going to do? Resigned.

Then there was us. If the people who lived here were carrying on like normal, what choices did we have? We had planned on eating stuff we brought with us, in the car, but we changed that plan. Restaurants and shops were open. In

that case, let's support the local businesses. Leave our cash in the neighborhood. So we decided on food that they are famous for there in Sōma, near the ocean, a dish of rice and clams. The Sakhalin surf clams used in it are harvested up north in Hokkaido; this we overheard this from one of the clerks explaining it to a local couple. They had asked where the clams had come from. We were at a place, a drive-in really, out along Route 6. Tasted great, for sure. But we had headed about 2 kilometers south of Sōma city center, and that also felt different somehow. The atmosphere was different, just slightly. We were getting ever closer to the border. Three more kilometers is all.

I don't think that had anything to do with the concentric circles.

It is just crossing the city limits.

We set out again, and crossed over an invisible boundary. Heading south to Minami Sōma (that's what it means after all: "South Sōma") a town that came into being in 2006. 2006 is Heisei 18. Which makes 2011 . . . I can never remember what year that is in Heisei, the imperial accounting. I have this deep resistance, a sense of opposition, to these imperial reign names anyway. I had assumed that, driving down route 6, we would run into a police checkpoint somewhere. We heard that there were none, but I had also heard that the prefectural police had been dispatched to enforce the 20 kilometer blockade. Fukushima prefectural police; a blockade of roads. But surely that would only apply to the main arterial roads. Actually, we had just discussed among ourselves whether to cross into the 30 kilometer area, we gave it careful consideration. I thought we should go as far as we could. It seemed like that might work. We gathered information. There were opposing opinions. Someone asked, "You sure we aren't all a bit overwhelmed by all this?" by the expectation that something might happen, that

is; I could see the point. Even so, I wasn't convinced. But I did think about it again later.

I mean, in the end, just showing up was not sufficient.

Doug Slaymaker is professor of Japanese at the University of Kentucky. His research focuses on literature and art of the twentieth century, with particular interest in Japanese writers and artists traveling to France; other projects include the literature of post-3.11 Japan, and of the environment. This research has been funded by the Fulbright Program, the Social Science Research Council, and other agencies. I would like to acknowledge the great effort that Asia-Pacific Journal contributing editor Akiko Takenaka has put into this translation; it would not have been possible without her collaboration. Books include [The Body in Postwar Fiction: Japanese Fiction after the War](#) (New York: Routledge, 2004. Paperback, 2012); [Literary Mischief: Sakaguchi Ango, Culture, and the War](#) (Edited with James Dorsey, with translations by James Dorsey. Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2010); and [Yōko Tawada: Voices from Everywhere](#). (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2007.)

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