

The Post-3/11 Quest for True Kizuna - Shi no Tsubute by Wagō Ryōichi and Kamisama 2011 by Kawakami Hiromi (真の「絆」を追求する3.11文学 — 和合亮一「詩の礫」と川上弘美「神様2011」を中心に —)

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Abstract

The reconstruction efforts following the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami (3/11) have sparked a rediscovery of the concept of *kizuna* (literally, "bonds between people"). Some Japanese authors, however, are contesting and expanding on this notion as a way of coming to terms with the disaster. Through the analysis of two literary works, I argue that 3/11 literature provides a model for Japan's emotional and physical reconstruction through its resourcefulness and alternative vision of *kizuna*.

Keywords

Great East Japan Earthquake, Tohoku earthquake, Fukushima, literature, Twitter, reconstruction, fiction

Introduction

Kamisama 2011 by Kawakami Hiromi and *Shi no Tsubute* by Wagō Ryōichi are two of the very early literary responses to the Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami that devastated the northern regions of Japan on 11 March 2011 (commonly referred to as "3/11"). These two works, albeit very different in genre and style, share an exploration of the concept of *kizuna* (literally: "bonds between people"), which has been popularised following 3/11. In this essay I will first outline the development of this post-3/11 concept of *kizuna*, and then show how these two authors redefine this notion in their respective works.

The term *kizuna* has become a true buzzword in post-3/11 Japan, used by government officials, athletes and charity organisations alike. Indeed, *kizuna* was chosen as one of the vogue words of the year in the *Shingo Ryūkōgo Taishō* awards, as well as being voted *kanji* of the year in 2011, ahead of other *kanji* such as 災 (*sai*) or 震 (*shin*), meaning "disaster" and "quake" respectively.¹ *Kizuna* has also been used as a keyword by numerous projects set up to support the disaster-hit areas, such as Ken Watanabe's "Kizuna 311", Japan News Network's "Kizuna Project" and the Japan Foundation's "Kizuna (Bond) Project", which sent high school and college students from Asia, Oceania and North America to the Tōhoku region.



Even a centre-left "Kizuna Party" was formed in January 2012, by a number of former members of the Democratic Party of Japan. Furthermore, as early as a month after the earthquake, the term was disseminated throughout the world when Prime Minister Kan Naoto's statement of gratitude for international aid, entitled "Kizuna - the bonds of friendship", was printed as an advertisement in major international

newspapers including the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, *Le Figaro*, the Russian newspaper *Kommersant*, South Korea's *Chosun Ilbo* and China's leading newspaper, *People's Daily*.²

There is thus no doubt that *kizuna* has come to be widely recognised as one of the words that represent the 3/11 triple disaster, but what exactly do these "bonds" refer to? It seems that the use of the term extends beyond the descriptions of the displays of mutual support shown in the disaster-hit areas in the immediate aftermath of 3/11, such as the sharing of provisions in the evacuation centres. For example, the Japanese Kanji Proficiency Society, organisers of the "Kanji of the Year" polls, provides three categories for the *kizuna* of 2011 on their website: the realisation of pre-existing *kizuna*; the formation of new *kizuna* and *kizuna* that connect us to the future, giving hope and courage.³ The realisation of pre-existing *kizuna* involved a rediscovery of *kizuna* between family, friends, lovers and members of the community, as well as a sudden increase in interest in marriage. The formation of new *kizuna* included behaviour such as the increased use of social media in Japan after 3/11, and the domestic and international volunteers who headed to the disaster-hit areas after 3/11 despite the damaged transportation system. Finally, as an example of *kizuna* that connects us to the future, the Society gives the example of Nadeshiko Japan, the Japan women's national football team.⁴ When Nadeshiko Japan won the 2011 FIFA Women's World Cup through their bonding as a team, they gave courage and hope to many Japanese citizens.

As psychiatrist and cultural critic Saitō Tamaki points out, *kizuna* was originally used to describe intimate and personal bonds such as the love for one's family or hometown, rather than public relationships.⁵ On the other hand, following 3/11, *kizuna* is now being used to sentimentalise and standardise any kind of

positive and heart-warming bond or relationship between Japanese people today, as shown above. This is an attitude which may be summed up simply as "caring for others and working together". In this context, it is implicitly connected with keywords such as "group-oriented" and "community" which are so often used to describe Japanese people in the texts of *Nihonjinron* (the discourse centred on the idea of a homogenous, unique and static Japanese identity).⁶ This broadened conceptualisation is especially useful for the Japanese authorities, who wish to unite all Japanese people in the effort to reconstruct the nation and divert attention from social issues. Post-3/11, the authorities have succeeded in incorporating *kizuna* into the *Nihonjinron* discourse, to make it seem as though prioritising national goals is part of the natural disposition of a Japanese citizen. It is implied that this prioritisation is carried out, if necessary, at the expense of more personal and familial goals – a complete departure from the original uses of the term *kizuna*.

One question remains unanswered, however: why did the concept become so widespread and popular in the first place? Although it is clear from the examples given above that *kizuna* has been actively promoted through Japanese official discourse, it is also true that international news stories on 3/11 played an equally important role. Anglophone news media such as *The Japan Times*, *The Telegraph* and ABC News 20/20 in the U.S. carried numerous stories on the behaviour of Japanese people in the disaster-hit areas, such as the absence of looting. They attributed this to Japanese national stereotypes such as group-orientation and a high level of social order.⁷ This evoked the concept of *kizuna*, albeit indirectly. Japanese citizens are able to watch overseas news programs on the NHK's BS2 channel, which runs programs from various countries with Japanese simultaneous translation. What was interesting in the case of 3/11 was that these stories were widely discussed by Internet

users who posted and viewed these stories on *matome* websites (aggregator sites), where they were accompanied by translated comments written by users from other countries.⁸ These posts glorify what are seen as typically "Japanese" values such as unity and cooperation. Through the activities of these netizens, the international perception that Japan is a country that is calm, collected and united in the face of disaster was made known to many Japanese people. These values came to be seen as national characteristics to be proud of and *kizuna* was linked to them. This may serve as a partial explanation for why the concept was so readily accepted among ordinary Japanese citizens.

Although many Japanese people see *kizuna* as a positive concept, others have expressed discomfort at the mindless repetition of the term, which carries the risk of masking other serious issues connected with 3/11. Saitō Tamaki, for example, warns that *kizuna* is not something that can be strengthened through effort, but rather is a product of time. Furthermore, he fears the spread of what he calls "*kizuna* bias" - a tendency to become blind to the shortcomings of society as a whole, as a result of excessive groupism.⁹ In Saitō's view, "*kizuna* bias" suppresses dissent, and encourages people to work together towards local and national goals rather than thinking about how to change society. He also believes that this "bias" has the potential danger of letting the government place the full burden of the care of the weak and vulnerable, including the disaster victims, on the shoulders of their families, in the name of *kizuna*.

Other commentators have begun to question the assumption that there was any increase in *kizuna* at all following 3/11. Japanologist Richard J. Samuels is one of many who have remarked on the "shallowness of local identities" due to the large-scale municipal mergers that concluded just a year before the disaster (*heisei-no-daigappei*; "the great Heisei

mergers"). According to Samuels, "reports of distrust among the new neighbours were reflected in choices of temporary shelters and undercut the ideals of community that were being spun by political leaders and editorialists".¹⁰ Furthermore, commentators from the literary world have been especially vocal in their opposition to the concept. Most notably, popular culture critic and novelist Azuma Hiroki pointed out that 3/11 only served to reveal the lack of solidarity in Japanese society.¹¹ The earthquake demonstrated that, despite the illusion of homogeneity and equality, personal circumstances such as income, place of residence or age translate directly to undeniable differences in the ability to deal with such disasters.¹² According to Azuma, Japanese people are coming to terms with the depressing realisation that they are on their own, and that even their government cannot be relied on in the case of such disasters¹³ - a situation which is a far cry from the image of social cohesion evoked by the concept of *kizuna*.

In any case, whether *kizuna* actually exists in contemporary Japanese society or not, the disaster has the potential to change Japanese society for the better. Current debates on such issues as the use of nuclear energy may pave the way for Japanese people to seriously start contemplating their future as a nation in new ways. Although it is of paramount importance to encourage the kind of mutual support that exemplifies the notion of *kizuna*, what Japan may need the most is a different vision of *kizuna* - one which first encourages reflection and necessary discussion, at times by harking back to the past, rather than a blind repetition of unsubstantiated hopes for the future. Wagō Ryōichi and Kawakami Hiromi are two authors who, by using their writing to offer alternative views of *kizuna* and of 3/11, have found strong support among those who are dissatisfied with the official representations of the disaster.



Wagō Ryōichi is a poet from Fukushima who grew up in the prefecture and now works as a Japanese teacher at a local high school, complementing his career in contemporary poetry. Wagō already had an established career as a poet prior to 3/11, having received the Chūya Nakahara prize for his debut poetry collection, *AFTER* (1998), and the 47th Bansui Prize for his fourth poetry collection, *Chikyū Zunō Shihen* [Earth Brain Psalms] (2006). Himself a victim of the earthquake, Wagō has decided to remain in Fukushima and to continue transmitting his first-hand views to the rest of Japan through poetry. He has most notably achieved this through his use of Twitter - a tool that allowed him to keep publishing his words in a time of emergency, when he did not even have a landline phone connection.¹⁴ Wagō conducted numerous impromptu poetry sessions on Twitter for a real-time audience

using the handle "@wago2828".¹⁵ These works have now been published in book format in the trilogy *Shi no Tsubute* ("Pebbles of Poetry"), *Shi no Mokurei* ("Silent Prayer of Poetry") and *Shi no Kaikō* ("Encounters with Poetry").¹⁶

***Shi no Tsubute* by Wagō Ryōichi**

Remaining in deserted Fukushima after sending his family off to Yamagata, Wagō was under no illusion that *kizuna* between all Japanese citizens was magically strengthened as a result of the earthquake. He reminisces that, at the time, he felt a profound sense of loneliness sitting in his room alone, realising that society does not necessarily protect all its members.¹⁷ One of Wagō's central themes at the start of *Shi no Tsubute* is precisely the lack of cooperation and understanding between Tōhoku and Tokyo, or the rest of Japan. Wagō started tweeting on 16 March 2011, just 5 days after the earthquake, and some of his first words express this concern.

I hear that no supplies have reached Minami Sōma, the city where I used to live. They say that's because no one wants to go into the city. Please save Minami Sōma.¹⁸

He also observes that people in Fukushima were "taught to wash their hair, hands and face after going outdoors" as a way of reducing radiation exposure, despite the serious lack of water in Fukushima at the time.¹⁹ There is silent anger in his words: "We do not have the water to do so". This railing against injustice is intensified by the fact that the electricity generated in Fukushima has supplied Tokyo for many decades.

Wagō's criticism and initial anger, however, seem to have become increasingly tempered as

time goes by. He especially begins to appreciate the bonds he forms with the ever-growing number of his followers on Twitter (of which there were only a dozen to begin with). He even mentions the word "kizuna" to refer to his ten-day bond with his readers in a tweet on 25 March.²⁰ At this stage, Wagō seems to feel that, despite the lack of government support, there is a certain *kizuna* that exists at the grass roots level. He has been encouraged by the feedback from his readers, which helped him "find himself" again and calm down the angry tone of his writing.²¹ He is also reminded of a different *kizuna* with his deceased grandmother whose voice reminds his angry childhood self to be kind to others ("*yasashiku, yasashiku*").²²

Kizuna between humans and nature

Through this renewed understanding of the positive powers of *kizuna*, Wagō proceeds to outline his own vision, which contains two elements: *kizuna* between humans and nature and *kizuna* between the current generation and future generations of Japanese people. The *kizuna* between humans and nature is evoked by the animal metaphors that occur throughout the work. Wagō uses the vibrations created by galloping horses as a metaphor for the earthquake, and describes those affected by the disaster as "sad riders".²³ His choice of the horse is symbolic as Minami-sōma hosts the famous Soma Wild Horse Chase (Sōma-Nomaio Festival). Many horses in the region were abandoned after 3/11, and were trapped without food or water. Horses therefore symbolise the innocent sacrifice of the Tōhoku people. Furthermore, horses are also represented as divine figures that are "trying to ascend to the sky".²⁴ In the Tōhoku region, the horse-god *oshira-sama* is revered as a guardian of the home. The horses in the text are described as angry and in despair, which may be a reference to the horses having turned into a kind of vindictive god (*tatarigami*), due to our selfish exploitation of nature and nuclear power.²⁵ Wagō initially adopts a confrontational

tone towards the horses. "When I start writing, an aftershock. Fine, I'll just write on your back" he writes on 19 March 2011.²⁶ Eventually, however, Wagō politely asks for forgiveness from the horses, and says that he is willing to be alone in Fukushima, if need be, as though offering himself as a human sacrifice to appease the angry animals.

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

Humans felt safe, having domesticated the uncontrollable cats. They loved their best friends, embracing their fluffy safety myth. Every human being on Earth entrusted their obedient slaves with their body and soul. Many billions of cats. Hairs standing on end. Hostility. Revealed.²⁷



Devastation in Minami Sōma after Tsunami

These cats are also metaphors for the

radioactive particles that have been "set free" by the nuclear meltdowns and are now roaming around Fukushima.²⁸ As in the horse metaphor, Wagō implies that humans are at fault for causing this "cat revolt". Humans cuddle up to the cats when they need them, and "abandon them with scorn when things go bad".²⁹ Wagō seems to imply that all these "animals" can be tamed, but in order to do so, a trusting relationship must be maintained between the two parties.³⁰ Whether horse-riders or cat-owners, Wagō asks his fellow human beings to "stroke the mane of the horses, tied up in the darkness".³¹ This can be read as a general call for humans to have a more respectful relationship with nature, which can also be seen in his non-animal metaphors such as "Overlapping. Hand on hand. Leaf on leaf",³² or in the depiction of his relationship with his walnut tree, which he mourns after it had to be cut down due to the risk of it falling over in an aftershock.³³

***Kizuna* between generations**

Wagō also places emphasis on the *kizuna* that he feels between himself and future generations of Japanese people. He suggests that we view the current generation as a *renketsuten* ("link") in history rather than as an endpoint,³⁴ implying a responsibility for providing the best circumstances possible for future generations. Furthermore, he believes that the way to achieve this kind of *kizuna* is through the power of words.³⁵ In order to connect with these future generations, Wagō explores new means of expression through his poetry. Wagō usually writes in abstract contemporary verse, but the language used in his Twitter poetry is plain and unadorned. Wagō himself points out that, pre-3/11, he had always been against the idea of poetry being written horizontally, using a word processor, and that he had never used "direct" expressions such as "sadness", "dream" or "life" in his poetry. In this sense, *Shi no Tsubute* represents a 180-degree turn in his stance towards

poetry.³⁶ In a public talk with Azuma Hiroki on 28 May 2011, Wagō said he felt as though he needed words that could be delivered immediately and directly to his readers in order to represent the disaster in real time, like a documentary.³⁷ He also acknowledged that this involved using language in a way that was closer to being informative than literary. In Wagō's own poetic words, "the metaphor has died" in the face of the sheer scale and immediacy of the disaster.³⁸ Wagō's goal in his post-3/11 writing has been to engage with reality more directly than does his traditional poetry.³⁹ As the myth that nuclear power is absolutely safe (*zettai anzen shinwa*) came crumbling down, Wagō also found himself abandoning his "absolute rules" and challenging the limits of poetry⁴⁰ - rebuilding his poetry from the debris, pebble by pebble.

Wagō's work ends with a verbal duel with a devil who tells him that his words are powerless, and that they cannot bring about any physical change or bring back the dead. Wagō, however, uses his poetry to fight and insists that he will keep writing and thinking about the disaster. He imagines himself on a boat, paddling towards his goal of "living this new poetry".⁴¹ Wagō continues to "live" his poetry by publishing it on Twitter and making his voice heard, and thereby opens up possibilities for bringing his words closer to reality. By "living" his poetry, Wagō also believes he helps the souls of the victims of the disaster live on. The book version ends with his afterword, where he finds a single walnut from the dead tree in his room, which he calls his "pebble of poetry".⁴² Poetry thus creates *kizuna* where it could not otherwise be created, with the deceased and with the yet-to-be-born, in the ineffable devastation of the tsunami and the fears of invisible radiation.

***Kamisama 2011* by Kawakami Hiromi**

Kamisama 2011 by Kawakami Hiromi also deals with the ideas of *kizuna* between humans and

nature and between generations, as explored in Wagō's work. Although it is still too early to conclude that these concerns represent a key theme of 3/11 literature, the similarities between these two texts, published within four months of each other, indicate the possibility of a further development of this theme in the future.



Kawakami Hiromi] Kawakami Hiromi is an Akutagawa Prize-winning novelist, known for her signature style of mixing fantasy and reality in her writing. Kawakami's *Kamisama 2011*, or *God Bless You, 2011*, is a rewriting of *Kamisama* (1994) – her first published literary work. Very short and almost fairytale-like in composition, *Kamisama* is a story about *watashi* ("I"), who can be assumed to be a young woman, who goes on a walk with a friendly talking bear.⁴³ The 2011 version

has exactly the same plot as the original, except for the fact that the events take place in a world post-3/11, probably near the Fukushima power plant, where one has to measure one's own radiation exposure every day and where there are no longer any children. The disaster of 3/11 is never referred to explicitly in the work, but indirectly as "*ano koto*" (that thing); despite the plot of the story being the same, the 2011 version *feels* completely different, because "that thing" has permeated every aspect of life.

Through a seemingly innocent juxtaposition of these two versions, Kawakami shows the devastating effects of 3/11, where everything that was normal in the past has changed beyond repair. The juxtaposition thus serves to highlight the fact that the abnormalities of life post-3/11 make us appreciate these normal moments that were perhaps overlooked before the earthquake. The 2011 version also demonstrates that we can no longer read the original version in the same way – and, by extension, we can no longer read or write any piece of literature in the same way. Kawakami achieves this effect in her work by inserting words such as "plutonium", "cesium" and "sV" (sieverts) that would never otherwise have appeared in her fantastical writing.⁴⁴

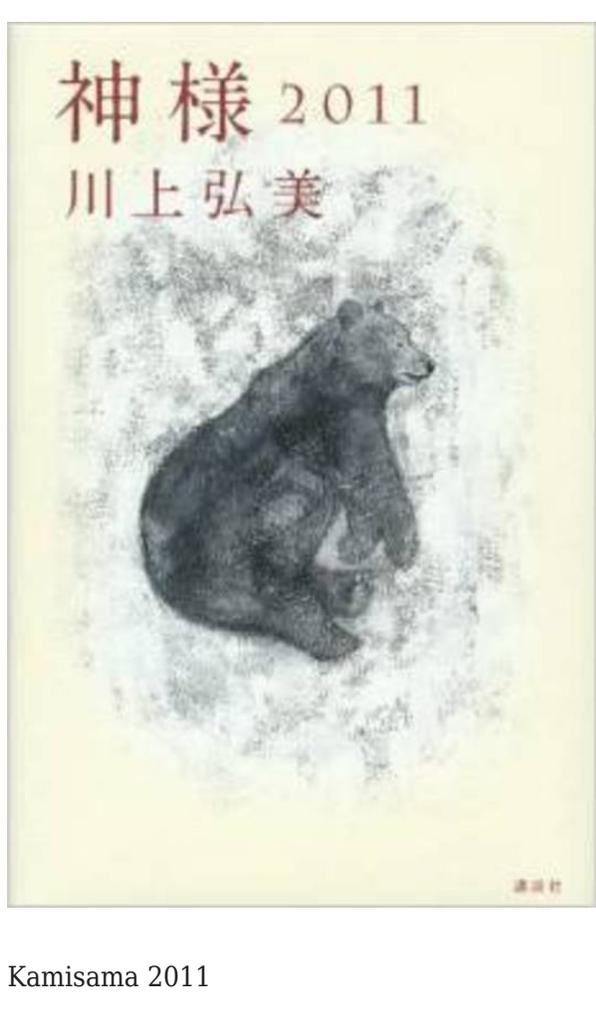
It is significant that Kawakami chose to rewrite this short story at this particular moment. Even in the original version, the bear in the story seems to represent the kind of "real" *kizuna* associated with traditional Japanese values and customs. When the bear moves to the same building as *watashi*, he goes to greet all his neighbours on the same floor of his building (and to the three remaining households post-3/11 in *Kamisama 2011*) with some *soba* noodles and ten postcards.⁴⁵ *Watashi* seems to consider this unnecessary – a reflection of the erosion of these traditional customs in Japanese society. Although it is unclear how relevant this

is to Fukushima rather than Tokyo, where Kawakami is based, Kawakami kept this example in *Kamisama 2011*. Furthermore, the bear appears to be very moved by the fact that *watashi* is a distant relative of someone who helped him a lot in the past (or during the post-3/11 evacuation process in *Kamisama 2011*), and uses the old-fashioned word "*enishi*" (fate) to describe the situation.⁴⁶ These gestures and words lead *watashi* to consider the bear to be "old-fashioned", and she reasons that the bear's non-human status is to blame for this - the bear needs to be overly considerate to others in order to be accepted in human society. The fact that the bear's actions appear odd and "old-fashioned" shows how much Japanese society has changed, and how little *kizuna* there is in Japanese society today. Later on, when the bear offers to sing a lullaby to *watashi* before her nap, *watashi* refuses, saying she can fall asleep without it.⁴⁷ This prompts a disappointed expression on the bear's face, probably because the lullaby was intended less as a pragmatic tool to help *watashi* fall asleep than as a moment of bonding between them. He therefore feels slightly offended that his offer was refused. *Watashi* seems unable to even recognise these signs of *kizuna*, let alone strengthen her bonds with others.

In *Kamisama 2011* the nuclear meltdowns in Fukushima are shown to have exacerbated this lack of *kizuna* between humans. Although the bear is punched and kicked by a little child in *Kamisama*, this violence is portrayed partly as a childlike and innocent act.⁴⁸ In *Kamisama 2011*, however, where there are no longer any children, two men in protective gear ("Long Gloves" and "Sunglasses") simply come up to the bear and *watashi* and pull on the bear's fur while talking about its resistance to radiation.⁴⁹ Although there is less physical violence involved, the way the man in the sunglasses refuses to look the bear straight in the eye and talks about the bear as if he is not even there makes the encounter much more hostile. The

bear, on the other hand, remains considerate and polite in *Kamisama 2011*, hiding his true feelings from *watashi* by saying "I guess they meant well".⁵⁰ He does, however, sound much less certain than in the original version, when he says "young people don't mean any harm, you know".⁵¹

The fact that this messenger of *kizuna* takes the form of a bear is also significant. The bear may not even literally be a creature of another species, but rather a metaphor for those who are discriminated against for looking different or for having a particular skin colour. The bear, who eats pâté and radishes with a baguette for lunch while *watashi* eats an *umeboshi* (pickled plum) rice ball, is a foreign figure to some extent, although bears are often seen around humans in Fukushima. This bear seems to belong neither in bear society nor in human society. In "*Sōjō no Chūshoku*" (The Luncheon on the Grass), a story that appears in the original *Kamisama* collection of short stories as a sequel to *Kamisama*, the bear eventually feels ostracised in human society which lacks *kizuna*; and goes back to live with his fellow bears. Tragically, Kawakami seems to suggest that there is no longer a place for real *kizuna* in modern Japan.⁵² Whether one looks at the bear as an animal or as a metaphorical figure, it is clear that the novel is commenting on Japanese society. In a society where strong community ties have been lost, people have much to learn about *kizuna* from these outsiders, whom Kawakami refers to as "symbols of minorities".⁵³



Kamisama 2011

Kizuna between Humans and Nature

Kawakami seems to imply that an Earth without bears or nature is not a sustainable place for humans to live. As Kawakami points out in the afterword to her book, Japanese people traditionally believed in a divine presence, or spirit, in all existing objects and living beings (*yaoyorozu no kami*) such as mountains, rivers, rain and animals, as well as in wells and even toilets.⁵⁴ Evoking this respectful *kizuna* that humans had with nature, Kawakami asks what the God of Uranium would be thinking now, about our exploitation of this natural resource.⁵⁵ Kawakami seems to be suggesting that we have made a kind of vindictive god (*tatarigami*) out of the "God of Uranium", and that Japanese people are

forgetting their general sense of reverence for those elements of nature that make their current lifestyles possible. She also seems to be warning her readers of the dangers of playing God. The nuclear reactions that happened over billions of years have reduced radioactivity on Earth to a level that human beings can finally inhabit, and yet humans risk turning Earth into an uninhabitable planet again by playing with nuclear power.

Although conventional Japanese literature focuses on the portrayal of *watashi* (as typified by the "I novel" genre known as '*watakushi shōsetsu*' or '*shishōsetsu*'),⁵⁶ Kawakami's works portray a different world view in which *watashi* is but a tiny existence in a world which will continue to revolve without these individuals. *Watashi* is not completely insignificant, though - Kawakami believes that each person's perspective still matters.⁵⁷ In Kawakami's world view, although humans have a contribution to make, they must realise that they are not as significant as they think. Such a view leads to better *kizuna* with nature. *Kamisama 2011* seems to be warning humans who act as though they are rulers of the vast playground of planet Earth that they are mere children, who still have much to fear from nature. Unlike religious beliefs and superstitions which aim to convey a similar message using scare tactics (such as the traditional Japanese association of earthquakes with an angry catfish), Kawakami's story evokes feelings of guilt, with particular pertinence in contemporary Japan.

Kizuna between generations

Like Wagō, Kawakami also evokes the *kizuna* that exists (or that needs to be strengthened) between Japanese people today and future generations. Postmodern novelist Takahashi Gen'ichirō includes a chapter in his post-3/11 novel *Koisuru Genpatsu* (A Nuclear Reactor in Love) called "Shinsai bungaku ron" (An essay on earthquake literature), where he reviews

some of the literary texts he believes are relevant to 3/11.⁵⁸ Although it is by no means clear whether this chapter reflects Takahashi's honest opinion, since it is part of a novel and not an essay, his analysis of Kawakami's text is worth mentioning. In fact, the Kawakami work discussed by Takahashi is an imaginary text, built on both versions of *Kamisama 2011*. Takahashi's version is *Kamisama (2011)*, a new text which adds parentheses to Kawakami's *Kamisama* and *Kamisama 2011* to indicate parts that have been added or deleted. Takahashi focuses his analysis on the abovementioned confrontation scenes, where the child punches and kicks the bear in the original version, and the two men (who were accompanying the child in the original version) simply pull the bear's fur and talk about him as if he is not there, in the post-3/11 version. Takahashi points out that superimposing the two texts in this manner creates an effect of the children talking behind the men, as if they are ghosts.⁵⁹ Although the ghost-like presence of children could be interpreted as the spirits of the young victims of the earthquake and tsunami, Takahashi prefers to read them as the future victims of radiation poisoning – children who will be killed by radiation, or will never be brought into this world due to fears about the effects of radiation.⁶⁰ For Takahashi, *Kamisama (2011)* is thus Kawakami's display of commitment towards future generations as a member of current society, in line with Kawakami's humble and respectful attitude towards the world.

Kawakami's vision of community also involves *kizuna* and offers reconciliation with those who were directly involved in the nuclear meltdowns. Kawakami prefers to refer to nuclear incidents as "that thing" as though to avoid placing the full blame on those who operated the power plant (by calling them *genpatsu jiko*, or "nuclear accidents", for example). This shows Kawakami's willingness to accept some of the blame as a member of society who used electricity derived from

nuclear power without questioning its safety. In this vision, all Japanese citizens who use electricity are in some way involved in the disaster, and thus bear some responsibility for any future consequences. Kawakami does not use quotation marks for *watashi's* dialogue, as though she is intending to merge the reader's consciousness with *watashi's*. The whole story reads as though it is a daydream. Kawakami is participating indirectly in Japan's recovery from the triple disaster, by guiding her readers to accept what has already happened and move forward, living in harmony with nature, so that their homeland can be passed onto future generations without further damage.

Conclusion

Wagō and Kawakami both challenge and then expand on the narrative of *kizuna* that has been repeated in mainstream media following 3/11. Rather than simply denying or questioning the existence of this *kizuna* in Japanese society, Wagō and Kawakami both present visions of *kizuna* which they believe to be more relevant to the physical and emotional reconstruction of the disaster-hit areas, at times by referring back to traditional Japanese worldviews. Most notably, both authors emphasise the importance of *kizuna* with nature as well as with future generations in their initial literary reactions to the triple disaster, even though these elements were not included in the popular notion of *kizuna* that was used by the mainstream media and the general public.

Wagō and Kawakami both changed their characteristic writing style significantly in their responses to the disaster. In order to disseminate their message in a timely manner, they both abandon any attempt at literary greatness or timelessness. Wagō, who previously only published his poetry in established literary magazines after weeks of refining his writing, now publishes impromptu poetry on Twitter. Kawakami destroyed her characteristic fantastical style, and produced a

story which can only be fully understood in the post-3/11 context. The two authors used what they could get their hands on – Twitter in the case of Wagō and a pre-existing story in the case of Kawakami – and managed to create something new out of the debris. In the face of this unprecedented disaster, 3/11 literature thus provides a model for Japan's emotional and physical reconstruction through its resourcefulness, sense of urgency, and alternative vision of *kizuna*.

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Notes

¹ Established in 1984, the *Shingo Ryūkōgo Taishō* ("the grand prize for new and popular words") is awarded to the top ten vogue words of the year, chosen by a committee of seven judges from a pool of public nominations. "Kanji" are the Chinese-derived ideographic characters used in Japanese, alongside the *hiragana* and *katakana* syllabaries.

² Tsuruoka Masahiro, "[Sekai no 'Kizuna' ni Kansha: Shushō, Kakkoku Yūryokushi ni Messēji Kōkoku](#)" [Thanking the World for their 'Kizuna': PM Sends Message Advertisement to

[Major International Newspapers](#)], *Asahi Shimbun Digital*, 12 April 2012. Retrieved 22 March 2014.

³ Japanese Kanji Proficiency Society. "[2011 nen 'Kotoshi no Kanji'](#)" [2011 'Kanji of the Year']. *Japanese Kanji Proficiency Society Website*, 2011. Retrieved on 23 March 2014.

⁴ *Nadeshiko* refers to the pink *Dianthus* flower (Cayrophyllaceae), which is said to symbolise Japanese femininity.

⁵ Saitō Tamaki, "'Kizuna' Renko ni Iwakan" [Feeling Uneasy with the Repetition of 'Kizuna']. *Mainichi Shimbun*, 11 December 2011.

⁶ Sugimoto Yoshio and Ross Mauer, *Nihonjinron no Hōteishiki* The Formula of Nihonjinron, Tokyo, Chikuma shobō, 1995, p. 198. See the rest of the book for an in-depth analysis of the development of *Nihonjinron*.

⁷ Amy Chavez, "[Hey, Look! No Loot!](#)" *The Japan Times* 26 March 2011. Retrieved on 29 January 2014; Susan Donaldson James and Russell Goldman, "[Japanese, Waiting in Line for Hours, Follow Social Order After Quake](#)" *ABC News*, 15 March 2011. Retrieved on 29 January 2014; Ed West, "[Why is There No Looting in Japan?](#)" *The Telegraph* 14 March 2011. Retrieved on 29 January 2014.

⁸ An example of this is: "[Kaigai 'Nihonjin ni Kokoro kara no Keii o': Shinsai Ji no 'Nihon no Tamashii' ni Gaikokujin Kandō](#)" [The World Sends their Heartfelt Respect to Japanese People: Foreigners are Touched by the "Japanese Spirit" Displayed After the Earthquake], Pandora no Yūtsu [Pandora's Gloom], 5 June 2013. Retrieved on 22 March 2014.

⁹ Saitō, "Kizuna".

¹⁰ Richard J. Samuels, *3.11: Disaster and Change in Japan*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2013, p. 40.

- ¹¹ Azuma Hiroki, "Shinsai de Bokutachi wa Barabara ni Natte Shimatta" [The Disaster Broke Us Apart], *Shisō Chizu Beta 2* [Thought Map Beta 2], 2011, p. 12. Also see English translation: Azuma Hiroki, "The Disaster Broke Us Apart", trans. Matsuyama Naoki, *Shisō Chizu Beta 2* [Thought Map Beta 2], 2011, p. 220-223.
- ¹² Azuma, "Shinsai", p.14.
- ¹³ Azuma, "Shinsai", p.14.
- ¹⁴ Wagō Ryōichi, and Kamata Minoru, "Taidan: 'Ganbarō' de Naku 'Akiramenai'" [Interview: 'Don't Give Up' Not 'Hang in There'], *Fujin Kōron* Women's Review, vol. 96, no. 25, 2011, p. 59.
- ¹⁵ It should be noted here that it is possible to say a lot more in a tweet (which has a 140-character limit) in Japanese than is possible in English.
- ¹⁶ For more information about *Shi no Tsubute* and a translated excerpt, see: Wagō Ryōichi, "Pebbles of Poetry: The Tōhoku Earthquake and Tsunami", *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 9, iss. 29, no. 4, 18 July 2011. Retrieved on 20 March 2014, from <http://japanfocus.org/-Jeffrey-Angles/3568>. For an in-depth analysis of Wagō's use of Twitter, see: Takushi Odagiri, "The End of Literature and the Beginning of Praxis: Wagō Ryōichi's *Pebbles of Poetry*", *Japan Forum*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2014, pp. 361-382.
- ¹⁷ Wagō Ryōichi, "Hito to Chikyū ni Torubeki Katachi o Anji Seyo: *Shi no Tsubute* to Iu Basho kara" [Suggesting to People and the Earth how they Should Be: From a Place Called *Shi no Tsubute*], *Gendaishi Techō* [Journal of Contemporary Poetry], vol. 54, no. 8, 2011, p. 130.
- ¹⁸ Wagō Ryōichi, *Shi no Tsubute*. Tokyo, Tokuma Shoten, 2011, p.11 (trans. Jeffrey Angles). All further translations from *Shi no Tsubute* are my own.
- ¹⁹ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 11.
- ²⁰ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 129.
- ²¹ Wagō and Kamata, "Taidan", p. 60.
- ²² Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, pp. 68, 74 and 210.
- ²³ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 22.
- ²⁴ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 106.
- ²⁵ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 68.
- ²⁶ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 48.
- ²⁷ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 141.
- ²⁸ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 141.
- ²⁹ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 213.
- ³⁰ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 208.
- ³¹ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 227.
- ³² Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 190.
- ³³ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 235.
- ³⁴ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 49.
- ³⁵ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 210.
- ³⁶ Wagō Ryōichi, "Chosha ni Kiku: Wagō Ryōichi *Shi no Tsubute*" [Ask the Author: Wagō Ryōichi *Shi no Tsubute*], *Chuō Kōron* Central Review, vol. 126, no. 8, 2011, p. 247.
- ³⁷ Wagō Ryōichi and Azuma Hiroki, "Fukushima kara Kangaeru Kotoba no Chikara" [Thinking From Fukushima About the Power of Words], *Shisō Chizu Beta 2* [Thought Map Beta 2], 2011, p. 187. The video version of this talk is available at: "[Nico Nama Shisō Chizu 01 Wagō Ryōichi X Azuma Hiroki](#)" [Niconico Live Thought Map 01 Wagō Ryōichi and Azuma Hiroki], *Niconico*, 30 May 2011. Retrieved on 22 March 2014.

- ³⁸ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 64.
- ³⁹ Wagō and Azuma, "Fukushima kara Kangaeru", p. 187.
- ⁴⁰ Fukuma Kenji and Wagō Ryoichi, "Daishinsai no Toshi, Shi no Ima o Kangaeru: *Aoi Ie*, Soshite, *Shi no Tsubute* Sanbusaku kara" [Thinking About Poetry Today in the Year of the Great Earthquake: *Aoi Ie*, and the *Shi no Tsubute* Trilogy], *Gendaishi Techō* Journal of Contemporary Poetry, vol. 54, no. 11, 2011, p. 18.
- ⁴¹ Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 261.
- ⁴² Wagō, *Shi no Tsubute*, p. 263.
- ⁴³ Although the bear will be referred to with male pronouns here, the gender of the bear is not stated in the novel.
- ⁴⁴ Kawakami Hiromi, *Kamisama 2011* God Bless You, 2011, Tokyo, Kodansha, 2011, pp. 29, 31 and 36; All English translations for *Kamisama, Kamisama 2011* and the postscript are works of Ted Goossen and Shibata Motoyuki, taken from Elmer Luke and David Karashima, *March was Made of Yarn: Writers Respond to Japan's Earthquake and Tsunami*, London, Harvill Secker, 2012, 37-53.
- ⁴⁵ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, pp. 5 and 23.
- ⁴⁶ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, pp. 6 and 24.
- ⁴⁷ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 13.
- ⁴⁸ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, pp. 9-10.
- ⁴⁹ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 29.
- ⁵⁰ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 30.
- ⁵¹ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 10.
- ⁵² Kawakami Hiromi, "Sōjō no Chūshoku" [The Luncheon on the Grass], in *Kamisama*, Tokyo, Chuō Kōron Shinsha, 1998, 175-92.
- ⁵³ Kawakami Hiromi, and Mitsuyoshi Numano, "Sekai wa Yuragi, Genjitsu to Gensō no Sakai mo Yuraide Iru: Nihon Bungaku no Hon'yakuka tachi to Shōsetsu *Kazahana o Kataru*" [The World is Shaking, and the Border Between Reality and Fantasy is Being Blurred: Discussing the Novel *Kazahana* with Translators of Japanese Literature], *Japanese Book News Salon*, Japan Foundation, 2012. Retrieved on 22 March 2014.
- ⁵⁴ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 39.
- ⁵⁵ Kawakami, *Kamisama 2011*, p. 43.
- ⁵⁶ For an in-depth exploration of the "I novel" genre, see: Edward Fowler, *The Rhetoric of Confession: Shishōsetsu in Early Twentieth-century Japanese Fiction*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1992.
- ⁵⁷ Kawakami and Numano, "Sekai wa Yuragi", unpaginated.
- ⁵⁸ Takahashi Gen'ichirō, *Koisuru Genpatsu* ^A Nuclear reactor in Love, Tokyo, Kōdansha, 2011.
- ⁵⁹ Takahashi, *Koisuru Genpatsu*, p. 210.
- ⁶⁰ Takahashi, *Koisuru Genpatsu*, p. 211.