

SEMIOTICS OF DISASTER: WRITING IN THE AFTERMATH OF JAPAN'S 3/11

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ABSTRACT

Hideo Furukawa's *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure* is among the first literary responses to Fukushima's 3/11 triple disaster – Japan's worst catastrophe in decades. This paper reflects on the formal characteristics of disaster writing by analyzing Furukawa's work with respect to its genre, temporal-spatial structure, and rhetorical style. It argues that the work's generic ambiguity, nonlinear narrative structure, and fractured, minimalist prose are paradoxically resonant with the gravity of the crisis that gave rise to the writing. The paper also highlights the metatextuality of *Horses*, which is as much about writing disaster as it is about *writing about writing disaster*, and argues that this metatextuality affords *Horses* a self-reflexiveness that distinguishes it as a unique piece of ecocritical literature.

KEYWORDS: Hideo Furukawa; Fukushima; 3/11 disaster; Japanese ecocriticism; metatextuality

How can literature respond to the aftermath of an environmental crisis, especially one of immense proportions where the extent of damage is on a scale beyond comprehension? Why even respond with literature? And what kind of literary form is appropriate for the purpose of such response?

The question "why literature" has a ready answer: literature, broadly defined, provides a possible line of flight for the imagination from the unutterability of a cataclysmic event. Here the outcome of writing, that is, the work per se, is less important than the act of writing, which serves a therapeutic function – not unlike a person suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder undergoing clinical therapy. For writers whose personal histories are embroiled in the event in question, writing is catharsis, affording the possibility of remembering, recalibrating, and redeeming their personal narratives through constructing a textual narrative that at once expresses and transforms their own.

This paper focuses on the formal characteristics of disaster writing, defined here as creative interventions that engage with both physical (pertaining to affected terrains and human as well as nonhuman agents) and emotional turbulence in the wake of environmental disasters, both natural and anthropogenic. Disaster literature has not been a major preoccupation of East Asian ecocriticism. Observing that "[m]ost humanistic research on East Asian literary works that discuss interactions between people and nature has looked at...literary celebrations of nature; depictions of nature as a refuge... or, *less frequently, episodes of people overpowered by calamities,*"¹ Karen Thornber notes:

*Much less has been published on East Asian creative negotiations with environmental damage, despite its presence in thousands of years of Chinese-, Japanese-, and Korean-language literatures, and particularly in the region's twentieth- and early twenty-first century creative corpuses.*²

This paper seeks to contribute to discussions on “East Asian creative negotiations with environmental damage” by analyzing a singular case of Japanese disaster writing. The work in question, Hideo Furukawa's *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure* (hereafter *Horses*), deals with a highly traumatic episode “of people overpowered by calamities” – the Fukushima triple disaster (earthquake, tsunami, nuclear meltdown) of March 11, 2011, also known as the 3/11 disaster.

A “genre-shock blend”

Horses was originally published in Japanese under the title *Umatachiyo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* 馬たちよ、それでも光は無垢で shortly after the 3/11 disaster, first in the journal *Shinchō* in July 2011 and subsequently in book form. In 2016 its English translation was made available by Columbia University Press.³ As it is one of the first literary responses to 3/11, the work is seen as “a touchstone for discussion of literature in the aftermath.”⁴

As a professional novelist Furukawa's intuitive reaction to the disaster is, quite naturally, to write. As he hails from the Fukushima prefecture (though he is somewhat alienated from it), he also feels the compulsion to traverse his distressed homeland. But *Horses* is no ordinary travel writing or disaster reportage. The conflation of Furukawa's dual identities as a writer documenting a disaster and as a Fukushima-born individual returning to his hometown affords an introspective, autobiographical dimension to the writing. It also unearths the tension underlying its conception.

To begin, the narrator feels insecure about his professional identity in the midst of the traumatic times, arriving at the conclusion that he is “[a] novelist unable to write novels.”⁵ Despite feeling discursively handicapped, Furukawa nonetheless feels the imperative to write. This “internal necessity, drive, compulsion”⁶ proves to become a source of agony. The enormity of the crisis is such that the narrator finds himself unable to write at several junctures: “But the answer was clear. No way I could write;”⁷ “The current problem is that *I am not writing any novels*. I can't write.”⁸ Yet writing remains his only salvation: “Even in the midst of this brain freeze I substitute words for the reality. With words. By words. I am a writer.”⁹

This constant tension between the *impulse* and the *impasse* of writing is frustrating for the narrator. Just as eyes “must be closeable...it should be easy; you'd think, but I can't do it,”¹⁰ it is impossible for him not to write and yet he can't. His identity crisis unravels in the continual interpellation of his writing by the immediate repercussions of the calamity. The narrator intercepts his own narrative intermittently to critique the act of writing, thereby turning *Horses* into a metatext: the story is as much about post-disaster Fukushima as it is about how to (not) write Fukushima. Beginning his manuscript on April 11, 2011, when an aftershock of over magnitude six occurred, Furukawa recounts that “[e]very time there was a strong aftershock, I would revise. The aftershocks left no options. A clear voice: ‘Revise completely and thoroughly’.”¹¹ And then later again: “Another major aftershock; today's manuscript – half a day's writing – goes into the trash.”¹² This dialectic between language and nature, discourse and destruction, results in anguish, engendering a kind of writer's complex manifesting as a genre complex:

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 work.¹³

The perceived inadequacy of literary straitjackets points to a central issue in writing disaster: genre. As a narrative, *Horses* is generically problematic because it meanders among different modes, suspending itself and reiteratively undulating in a no-man's land. Resisting "facile classification,"¹⁴ it has been variously characterized as a "novel," "documentary-cum-novel,"¹⁵ and, rather descriptively, a "genre-shock blend of fiction, memoir, history, and reportage."¹⁶ The question for us is what this genre ambiguity tells us more generally about the nature of disaster writing.

The narrative-proper of *Horses* (if indeed there is one) revolves around the narrator's trip to Fukushima both to witness and document the disaster, and also to quell his guilt as a Fukushima-born Japanese who had long left his hometown and hence avoided 3/11 first-hand. What is striking about this narrative is that it keeps resisting its flow, as if refusing to be told. From a reader's perspective, *Horses* is a very distracting read thanks to its many proliferating and interweaving strands. Apart from documenting the visuality of trauma, the text digresses into Furukawa's day-to-day activities as a writer, short bursts of childhood memories, mythological musings, literature, and lengthy excursions into the military history of Japan's Tōhoku (Northeastern) region, which encompasses present-day Fukushima. The centrifugality of the narrative makes it difficult to maneuver, and this constitutes the core of its aesthetics.

The historical digressions on Northeastern Japan are linked to *The Holy Family* (*Seikazōken*), Furukawa's 2008 epic mega-novel set in ancient Tōhoku. It is significant that *Horses* begins with a scene from *The Holy Family*, which punctuates the main narrative throughout, creating a complex intertextuality that mediates past and present, fiction and reality, with Fukushima as nexus. This intriguing dynamic culminates in a magical-realist episode, where one of the protagonists in *The Holy Family*, Inuzuka Gyūichirō, appears in *Horses* as a specter, an additional "member" to the team comprising the narrator and his three companions. Here we witness an intense metatextual discourse spiraling the narrative unto itself:

And there, tightly squeezed into that space where one expects the armrest, I saw him. I was the last one to get into the car.

It was him.

There is this command: "Write." OK. I will write this. I am writing: Inuzuka Gyūichirō was there. A fifth passenger. The fifth person in our party. "Write": The oldest brother of *The Holy Family*...was in the car with us. But if I write *that*, I've got fiction, and this essay turns into a novel. But I have my integrity to preserve in this; there has not been a single fabrication in what I have written thus far. I may have been hesitant, but no fabrications. By making this essay a definitive "real account," I was hoping for something, for a definitive salvation.¹⁷

This scene not only recalls García Márquez; it is also spectacularly Freudian. It enacts an involution where the narrator interrogates the nature of his writing about Fukushima by bringing to life, as it were, a fictional character of his own making. The compulsion to *write about writing* is symptomatic of the inherent difficulty of the narrative act itself. The

unmistakable irony is that the narrator pretends to be taking instructions from his protagonist to write, when this protagonist – his alter ego – is a mere figure of his earlier creative invention. It is as if the narrator needed an extraneous push to write, so much so that this had to come *externally from within*.

This important scene encapsulates the genre problematic in *Horses*. It foregrounds the question of how to respond discursively to a calamity on the scale of 3/11, specifically the form that such discourse can take. The matter is ultimately unresolved: Furukawa's claim that he hopes to produce a "real account" – note the inverted commas in the quotation above, analogous to a Freudian slip – of what has happened in Fukushima is undermined from within the text by his bizarre invocation of a fictional character as an apparent "person", an apparition, in the present discourse.

The narrator's clairvoyant-clairaudient experience with his fictional character (he "sees" and "hears" Gyūichirō from the back seat of their rental car) further extends into dialogic mode. In one scene the narrator asks one of his fellow travelers Ms. S why there are no seagulls to be seen, to which Ms. S responds that it is because there are no fish to be hunted. Here a surrealist turn occurs as the conversation slips inconspicuously into a "dialogue" between the narrator and Gyūichirō. This deliberate (con)fusing of actual talk (with Ms. S) and imaginary talk (with Gyūichirō) evokes a dreamy, subconscious quality. Further: this imaginary conversation is purportedly inflected with Fukushima accent and dialect, "that half-made-up language that was tweaked and inserted in *The Holy Family*,"¹⁸ as if it were manifestly real. In the following interlocution, the narrator and Gyūichirō engage in a bizarre exchange over the clarity of speech, which, from a psychoanalytic point of view, is the narrator ironing out his own thoughts through soliloquy:

"In other words, you are to be the eternal firstborn," I said.

"Isn't that what I just said?" he shot back.

"When?"

"Now. Just a minute ago. So now what are you thinking? You trying to say that that's what you said? You trying to say that this was some pronouncement of yours, that I am some temporary construction you came up with?"

"Is that it?" I asked.

"If you continue with these stupid antics," he said, "you're going to lose your mind, you know."

I kept silent.¹⁹

The metatextual irony of the narrator's self-critique ("You trying to say that this was some pronouncement of yours, that I am some temporary construction you came up with?") is almost humorous, bringing into relief the hallucinatory nature of the reality-fiction divide. All of this leaves readers stranded in a liminal state, slightly perplexed as to whether there is an actual conversation going on, or whether it is ultimately the narrator talking to himself inside his head. Liminality characterizes the emotional condition of the narrator, who experiences a constant sense of floating ungroundedness amid disbelief and disenchantment as he makes his way through battered Fukushima.

The "genre-shock blend" in *Horses* is not so much a result of deliberate creative experimentation as it is a symptom of a want of discursive resources with which to respond to a crisis. The metatextuality of the writing points to its emergence as a product of constant negotiation with the drastic circumstances, interrogating the possibility of writing in the aftermath. In other words, the text arises as a contingency, an anomaly, much as 3/11 is for Fukushima and for the whole of Japan. The surreal passages imbue it with an otherworldly aura, providing the narrator with an escape route into a safe, imaginary realm where he can reflect upon the act of writing. That the work on a whole

eludes a categorical label points to the unpremeditated nature of its conception (it was never *meant* to be written) as well as its insecure identity as an intervention into a disaster too shocking to be articulated in any neat literary form. In terms of genre, the text is in flux; it is a bit of everything and ultimately not a “thing” – magical-realist fiction, autobiography, historical thesis, reportage, etc. It is a labyrinthine of forms that is as disorienting to the unprepared reader as 3/11 is for the narrator.

Temporal-spatial dislocations

Ancillary to the generic eclecticism of *Horses* is its nonlinearity in time and space. The narrator’s embarkation on his homebound trip does not begin until we are well through a quarter of the book. This signals procrastination on the part of the narrator, corroborating my earlier point about the incessant distraction of the main narrative by other strands. One can almost read a subtle resistance into the impeded, halting rhythm, as if there is both a desire to write Fukushima and a counter-desire to suspend this writing for as long as possible to avoid confronting the crisis. There is both a pull toward Fukushima and a reactive pushback.

The narrator shuttles us through a series of mundane events haphazardly, flinging us back and forth among real-time, fictional time (of the novel *The Holy Family*), and historical time (of ancient Japan). This fluctuating structure defies schematic progression, creating a disarraying sense of being lost in time. Beginning with an out-of-the-realm episode from *The Holy Family*, readers are led to enter into chronological regression: April 11 (writing of *Horses* starts); April 9 (CD release party of narrator’s friend); April 10 (charity event for 3/11 in Kyoto); March 27 (poetry reading event in Tokyo); March 13 (writing request from press agency). Then, abruptly we are jolted forward to April 13. The sense of dislocation is most evident where the narrator attempts to clarify the “present” time in his discourse: “‘This morning’ refers to April 13. But the ‘now’ of the Kyoto hotel where I am refers to March 11.”²⁰

The narrative then manages to take us through the Fukushima trip from April 13 to April 30, when the narrator flies into New York. And between these dates, the narrator jumps in to remind us that he is writing retrospectively: “Here I am writing this manuscript. Composing this essay. I must now return to the current date and time. Today is May 12.”²¹ The date references serve as signposts, not only of the narrator’s physical trajectory, but also of his subjective impression of time being dislodged. It is as if the date references are installed to resist the dissipation or “spiriting away” of time. Time spirited away is time “abducted by spirits,” “extinguished,” excruciatingly prolonged, with the narrator experiencing “one day as though it was a week. Or three days that felt like a month.”²²

The spiriting away of time is thus a psychological condition where dates and days feel as if they are “hijacked”;²³ they are subject to slippage²⁴ and disappearance,²⁵ disavowed of their corporeality.²⁶ Given the centrality of time to narrative structuring in general, the recurrent theme of stagnated, spirited-away time in *Horses* is a metatextual deconstruction of its tenability as a narrative. This is in part a conscious choice – “Now that I’ve remembered, or become newly aware of the dates...I’m 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 backward and work against the flow.”²⁷ Despite this initial determination, the narrator reboots his writing again and again, continually interpellated by the contingencies of disaster relief efforts.

If the libidinal act of writing embodies the narrator’s attempt to make sense of his identity, representing his discursive redemption in the wake of 3/11, it also undermines

itself from within its own heavily discordant rhythm. Its chaotic tempo, created through the chronological disordering of events, encumbers the narrative momentum to move forward. There is “more of stagnation than progress,”²⁸ in other words, a tendency toward inertia, in both the textual and the emotional world. Within the drive to write the moment of crisis is the reiterative drive to escape the present, hence all the digressions into the past (both personal and cultural), the delayed onset of the “main” storyline, and the temporal regression and rupture even in the narrative present.

This explains why the narrator keeps revising and resetting his manuscript: the act of writing constitutes the process of sorting out his Self, a process that is anything but straightforward. The text being a clearing house of memories and pain, it cannot be set in a mode of relentless propulsion, but must instead be conceived in the present continuous, where narrative time appears “spirited away.” “Furukawa wants no part of the memorializing [of 3/11], no part of this forgetting, no part of the attempts to place these events in the ‘past tense’.”²⁹ The illusion of the present progressive is sustained through a looping cycle of backflashes and present-moment narrations, inching forward in time while also compulsively backtracking into the past and branching into wayward paths. On this reading, the very last line of the text gains poignant significance: “And at this point my essay ends, and begins.”³⁰ If writing is indeed moral redemption, then the text cannot genuinely conclude, for the story of Fukushima goes on.

Corresponding to the nonlinearity of time is the nonlinearity of space, as governed by the image of concentric circles. Concentric circles mark out tiers of bounded spaces, or in the case of Fukushima, out-of-bounds spaces – the imagery stems from the official designation of a gradation of danger zones affected by the meltdown of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant. These concentric circles preoccupy the narrator’s imagination; they mark out a layered forbidden space exerting a compelling force on the narrator to “go there”:³¹

I put my hand on those circles.

On the screen streaming the news.

I can feel the rings. They speak to me. “Go.”...“Go.” There was the voice. “You must go there. Inside the concentric circles.”³²

The visuality imposed by these circles gives rise to an inside-outside demarcation. The narrator is guilt-ridden by his being “outside” the affected areas, hence his quasi-masochistic desire to enter those forbidden zones: “When I analyze it I find that it was I who felt the need to expose myself to radiation, it was I alone exposing myself to this violence. I get that. It was a suicide wish.”³³

The narrator’s traversal across concentric spaces is marked by a sense of spatial disorientation: “I was assailed by a strong sense of floating. Where are we? Where is this?”³⁴ One feels as though he is entrapped, both physically and psychologically, in the weightless space enclosed by the concentric circles. It is no surprise then that he decides to take off for New York toward the end of the story: that is his only exit route from the spiraling bind of the Fukushima circles. The narrator’s construction of New York’s 9/11 as a “memorial twin”³⁵ of 3/11 may seem oblique,³⁶ but within the spatial schema of the narrative, it represents a conceptual path through which he can flee his heavily territorialized and circumscribed imaginary and redeem himself by way of analogizing with another national trauma, in an entirely different space.

The narrative predisposition to stagnate, as noted above, is also captured by the prosaicness of the writing. Furukawa's text is composed of short, simple sentences scattered with rhetorical questions, at times breaking further into sentence fragments.³⁷

Replete with single-sentence or single-fragment paragraphs (like this one).

The staccato syntax ebbs the narrative flow. The stifled continuity of the discourse correlates with the narrator's strain in trying to take us through his thoughts and emotions coherently. In light of fractured landscapes and mindscapes after 3/11, this anti-lyrical, unsentimental style exudes an understated simplicity that best conveys the incomprehensibility of the events that transpired, and the impairment of the efficacy of language in rationalizing them; or: "temporary aphasia."³⁸ The immensity of the destruction is such that language cannot but succumb: "Such power, [*sic*] to wipe out everything. There are no words for it;"³⁹ "How far should I go in describing all these thousands, tens of thousands, of parts [of objects dislodged by the tsunami]."⁴⁰

It is curious to note that the English translator Doug Slaymaker describes Furukawa's style as "forceful", "dramatic", "effusive" and "maximalist."⁴¹ My reading, based on Slaymaker's (with Akiko Takenaka) English rendition, yields a very different observation. To me *Horse's* style is meandering, undramatic, evasive, and minimalist; the scattered, unadorned language belies pain – better still, it *is* pain. As Lofgren observes, "[t]he sense of fracture permeates the prose, a relentless reminder of the splintered reality born on 3.11...."⁴² Citing Elaine Scarry, Simon Estok reminds us that pain is "language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates; as the self disintegrates, so that which would express and project the self is robbed of its source and its object."⁴³ In the following scene depicting a badly tattered part of Fukushima, the powerful visuality of the tsunami's impact contrasts sharply and paradoxically with the underwhelming syntax that carries it:

Stench. Vinyl records were scattered across the surface of the ground here, too. Shattered. No two of them were the same, and each and every one had been damaged; that message was soundlessly conveyed. Private vehicles overturned, smashed; the accumulated violence conveyed differently in each one. Buildings reduced to steel skeletons; they remain, yet each one is clearly "not there." Motorcycles, crumpled like foil. A farm tractor was crushed, upended, its paint also much too colourful. Its beauty, the brilliance, cruel.⁴⁴

The juxtaposition of stranded objects using a broken syntax foregrounds the stark materiality of the scene. The choppy rhythm creates a veil of emotional detachment, masking the pain and enabling objects to "speak for themselves." At some points, the narrative moves into a discourse bordering on streams of consciousness, floating dreamily in and out of reality. In one exemplary passage, seeing vast rice fields submerged by the tsunami, the narrator takes a series of imaginative leaps into the mythical realm:

Now-dead rice fields reflecting sunlight.... The water surface is like a mirror. Blue sky reflects off it, albeit slightly cloudy. The sun is going down into that mirror surface. The setting sun, the sun. The august imperial ancestral sun goddess.

Why death to the rice fields? Why death here, too?

We encountered members of the Self-Defense Forces....

They guided us from impassable roads to passable ones, onto farm roads.

Then, the *Kojiki*. It seems to me that the role of the myriad gods, and the emperor, is to petition for an abundant harvest of the five grains, of which rice is the first among equals.⁴⁵

The transition from an observation of destroyed rice fields, through the setting sun to a sun goddess, then to an encounter with soldiers on duty, and finally to a rumination on *Kojiki* (an ancient source of mythologies) epitomizes an unstable trajectory. The randomness of the narrator's creative consciousness points to the unfeasibility of a linear, structured, and rationalized representation of events during a time of intense crisis.

At a higher level of rhetoric, the featuring of animals warrants attention, especially given the book's title. Horses, entwined with the history of Northeastern Japan, are deftly turned into a figure of speech – a metonymy – for the region. One could further argue, in line with our earlier point, that a focus on animals serves to distract the narrator from the ineffable pain in the face of human tragedy, effecting a psychological transference that temporarily passes the burden of encountering pain on to animals. In respect of 3/11, writing animals becomes eminently more bearable than writing humans.

On this note it is significant that the book concludes with a poignant scene *sans* human. An emaciated white horse encounters an equally emaciated cow in a deserted, potentially infected, zone, both searching for food. The two trot one after another to an embankment where they start chewing on green grass. In the conspicuous absence of human actors, the narrator turns to animals and nature as embodied metaphors of hope in the midst of devastation:

All the grasses were gaining nourishment from the light. Light was falling, sunlight. About three kilometers to the east of this is the shoreline. The seabirds are calling. But nothing is dying. Death definitely exists, but in this moment, death is not at work.”⁴⁶

The instinctive actions of animals (food searching, eating, calling) hint at a rehabilitation of the nonhuman environment – grasses growing, sunlight falling – that points to a rejuvenation of life in general. By way of this coda, the book ends on a cautiously optimistic tone, revealing the true light of its title.

Conclusion

In Japanese ecocriticism, the works of Ishimure Michiko, among a few other environmentally-inclined authors, have become a major landmark.⁴⁷ Yet there is always more than one way to tell a story, including stories about calamities. In writing the environment, authors can operate with several parameters with respect to mode, structure, and style: between *extrospection* (where the focus is oriented toward the outside world) and *introspection* (where the focus is directed toward the narrator's thoughts); between the *structured* and the *unstructured*; and between *lyricism* (where the prose tends toward intensity) and *anti-lyricism* (where the prose tends toward the minimal).

In this regard, *Horses* takes a distinctive place in Japanese ecocriticism, creating a counterpoint to the Ishimure Michiko tradition. Although the text “foregrounds material relations as fundamental to narrative” and “emphasizes the bond, the fetter, the bowline, the *ligare*, of one being to another at the level of care and substance, of thought and matter,”⁴⁸ in the final analysis it is more an introspective journey into the narrator's psyche than an extrospective reportage of Fukushima-in-crisis. Its genre ambiguity, nonlinear time-space structures, detached prose, and confessional tone render it raw, confusing, multilayered, and strongly subjective.⁴⁹

This is completely apposite considering the magnitude of 3/11, which defies rational-linear logic – and hence rational-linear writing. The highly unchoreographed style of the

piece thus resonates paradoxically with the gravitas of the event that triggers it. *Horses* thus exemplifies a semiotics of disaster of interest to environmental literature. This is a semiotics of flux where signifiers keep fragmenting and proliferating without being rooted to a stable signified, hence mirroring the still unraveling “semiotic world event”⁵⁰ of 3/11 that laterally connects with other world disasters. It is characterized by chaos rather than order, nonlinearity rather than linearity, and heterogeneity rather than unity of forms. In the same way as the narrative trajectories of *Horses* crisscross one another, fading in and out against the background of destruction, and weaving history, myth, fiction, and reality into a complex semiotic matrix, the signification of 3/11 as a “semiotic world event” is in perpetual flux as its ramifications continue to unfold.

This flux, however, is simultaneously grounded in the “local geographies and strands of culture within the [Fukushima] prefecture known for its long tradition of horse-breeding.”⁵¹ With this, *Horses* manages to introduce diachronic depth to the locality in question, preventing “Fukushima” from turning into a compressed, synchronic sign for disaster. In so doing, it gives “the reader more to experience in prose and ‘remember’ about the region than its direst hour—an effort far more promising than the crisis-driven news cycle in building lasting empathy.”⁵²

If 3/11 “is as much a question of material destruction and contamination as of collective care for human and nonhuman life forms, local places, and planetary becomings,”⁵³ *Horses* adds further dimensions to the picture through the eyes of a Fukushima-born writer: fictional, historical, mythical, and ultimately, personal. Importantly, what distinguishes *Horses* is that it not only writes disaster; it is as much, if not more, about *writing about writing disaster*. The metatextuality of the work gives it a self-reflexive spin that makes it stand out as a unique piece of ecocritical writing.

Notes

1. Karen Thornber, “Afterword: Ecocritical and Literary Futures,” in *East Asian Ecocriticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Simon C. Estok and Won-Chung Kim (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 242; emphasis added.
2. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.
3. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure: A Tale That Begins with Fukushima*, trans. Doug Slaymaker with Akiko Takenaka (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016). There is apparently an alternative English title, *Horses, Horses, in the Innocence of Light*; see Doug Slaymaker, “Horses and Ferns: Kaneko Mitsuharu and Furukawa Hideo,” *Ecocriticism in Japan*, ed. Hisaaki Wake, Keijiro Suga and Yuki Masami (Lanham: Lexington, 2018), 157-172.
4. Doug Slaymaker, “Translator’s Afterword,” in Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 141.
5. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 28.
6. *Ibid.*, 7.
7. *Ibid.*, 7.
8. *Ibid.*, 50.
9. *Ibid.*, 61-62.
10. *Ibid.*, 3.
11. *Ibid.*, 8.
12. *Ibid.*, 14.
13. *Ibid.*, 7-8.
14. Erik R. Lofgren, “Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure: A Tale That Begins with Fukushima,” *World Literature Today* 90, no.5 (2016): 75.
15. Columbia University Press Website, <https://cup.columbia.edu/book/horses-horses-in-the-end-the-light-remains-pure/9780231178693>. The book is classified as “fiction” on its copyright page.
16. Barbara Hoffert, “Important Fiction in Translation Beyond the Best Sellers: Reading the World,” *Library Journal* 141, no. 11 (2016): 68.
17. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 66-67.
18. *Ibid.*, 69.
19. *Ibid.*, 69-70.
20. *Ibid.*, 20.
21. *Ibid.*, 106-107.

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22. Ibid., 4.
23. Ibid., 17.
24. Ibid., 34-35: "Time for us...began to mix in a three-to-one ratio, and the days of the calendar, too, were beginning to slip."
25. Ibid., 22: "I sensed the beginning of the disappearance of dates."
26. Ibid., 28: "dates don't feel real. Dates don't exist."
27. Ibid., 14.
28. Ibid., 6.
29. Doug Slaymaker, "Horses and Ferns," 165.
30. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 140.
31. Ibid., 3.
32. Ibid., 25.
33. Ibid., 25.
34. Ibid., 36.
35. Ibid., 110.
36. Erik R. Lofgren, "Horses," 75.
37. In making this point, I am aware of my reliance on the English translation of the text, and that Japanese and English differ in their syntactical patterns and punctuation schemes. The above notwithstanding, it is believed that the general argument here remains valid.
38. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 126.
39. Ibid., 42.
40. Ibid., 45.
41. Doug Slaymaker, "Translator's Afterword," 145.
42. Erik R. Lofgren, "Horses," 75.
43. Simon C. Estok, "Painful Material Realities, Tragedy, Ecophobia," in *Material Ecocriticism*, ed. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (Indiana University Press, 2014), 133.
44. Hideo Furukawa, *Horses*, 61.
45. Ibid., 64-65.
46. Ibid., 140.
47. On the writings of Ishimure Michiko, see Karen Thornber, "Ishimure Michiko and Global Ecocriticism," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 14, no.13 (2016), <http://apjif.org/-Karen-Thornber/4919/article.pdf>; Christine Marran, *Ecology Without Culture: Aesthetics for a Toxic World* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 27-53; and Bruce Allen and Yuki Masami, ed. *Ishimure Michiko's Writing in Ecocritical Perspective: Between Sea and Sky* (London: Lexington, 2016).
48. Christine Marran, *Ecology Without Culture*, 27.
49. Doug Slaymaker, "Horses and Ferns," 165.
50. Ibid.
51. Justin Maki, Review of *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure: A Tale that Begins with Fukushima*, *Asymptote*, May 30, 2016, <https://www.asymptotejournal.com/blog/tag/horses-horses-in-the-end-the-light-remains-pure-a-tale-that-begins-with-fukushima/>.
52. Ibid.
53. Christophe Thouny, "Planetary Atmospheres of Fukushima: Introduction," in *Planetary Atmospheres and Urban Society After Fukushima*, ed. Christophe Thouny and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto (Singapore: Palgrave, 2017), 11.