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Themes and Characteristics of Japanese "Post-3.11 Literature"

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ABSTRACT
Following the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake, the Japanese literary world witnessed a significant emergence of literary works set against the backdrop of the massive disaster, a body of work now often referred to as "Post-3.11 Literature." This corpus is not only substantial in volume but also thematically diverse, generally divisible into four major thematic categories: trauma and healing from the disaster, the nuclear catastrophe and ecological crisis, critique of social realities, and procreative anxiety. While each of these thematic expressions has its distinct focus, they collectively reflect the social characteristics of post-3.11 Japan and the psychological state of its people in the aftermath. Ultimately, Post-3.11 Literature gives voice to the psychological trauma experienced by the Japanese populace, mirrors the new social dynamics of the "Post-3.11 Era," and has made a valuable contribution to the global corpus of disaster literature.

Keywords: *Post-3.11 literature, Literary themes, Artistic characteristics.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The 3.11 earthquake and the subsequent Fukushima nuclear accident caused tremendous loss of life and property, severely damaging Japanese society and inflicting profound mental trauma on the Japanese people. Over the past decade, the Japanese literary scene has witnessed the emergence of a number of trauma literature works set against the backdrop of the great earthquake. Some of these works directly address the 3.11 earthquake, while others, although not directly themed around it, reflect the social characteristics of post-3.11 Japan and the mental state of the Japanese people in the aftermath of the disaster. Therefore, studying "post-3.11 literature" in Japan can provide an important reference for a comprehensive understanding of contemporary Japanese society. "Post-3.11 literature" is not only voluminous but also encompasses a wide range of thematic expressions, which can be roughly divided into four major themes: earthquake trauma and healing, nuclear disaster and ecological crisis, social reality criticism, and reproductive crisis.

2. TRAUMA AND HEALING FROM THE DISASTER

The 3.11 earthquake catastrophically obliterated coastal towns, villages, and farmlands across northeastern Japan in a matter of moments, reducing countless familiar streets to rubble and instantly claiming tens of thousands of lives. For survivors, this entailed not only the loss of homes, land, and livelihoods but also, on a deeper psychological level, the permanent separation from loved ones, the disintegration of community bonds, and the collapse of intimate social networks. This multifaceted and profound sense of loss constitutes the most immediate emotional foundation of "Post-3.11 Literature".

The literary representation of this devastation is achieved through the interweaving of personal memory and collective recollection. Writers delve into the individual trauma narratives of survivors while simultaneously utilizing historical context and social documentation to reveal how this profound grief permeates the spiritual fabric of a region and, indeed, the nation itself.

The anthology *And Yet, March Comes Again* exemplifies this thematic exploration through

poignant details: a school uniform bearing a name washed up on the shore, faded family photographs carried inland by the tsunami, pets still waiting faithfully amidst the ruins. These artifacts become powerful vessels for the survivors' grief and remembrance. Notably, the collection includes "Words" by Shuntarō Tanikawa, one of the first major poetic responses to the disaster.

"Everything is lost / Even words are lost / But words did not crumble / Nor were they washed away / Within each person's heart / Words are sprouting / From the earth beneath the rubble / An old accent / A hurried script / A fragmented meaning / Ancient words / Revived by suffering / Deepened by sorrow / Taking on new meaning / Backed by silence." [1]

Despite its brevity, the poem demonstrates remarkable insight by linking the profound sense of loss with the resilience and regeneration of language, revealing the poet's deep humanistic concern in the face of catastrophic natural forces.

Similarly, Kiyoshi Shigemoto's short story *The Magic Ritual* approaches trauma through an individualized lens. The protagonist, Machiko, watches on television as the coastal town of her childhood is engulfed by the tsunami. This disaster triggers memories of former classmates and profound survivor's guilt, compelling her to return to the devastated area. Finding her hometown transformed into a barren landscape and her former school converted into a shelter, its gymnasium walls papered with missing-person notices, she pins her only class photograph there, hoping to reconstruct a lost connection. By a swing set where she once played, Machiko discovers, to her astonishment, that a "magic ritual" she invented with a childhood friend has been adopted by local children as a rite to wish for reunions. The story masterfully intertwines the destruction of physical space, the fragility of memory, survivor's guilt, and the tenacious persistence of community traditions. It effectively maps the dual trajectories of catastrophic rupture and emotional reconstruction. In a literary critical sense, Shigemoto's work transforms mundane details into potent symbols of collective traumatic memory, offering a compelling narrative model for understanding the "loss-endurance-hope" emotional logic central to much post-disaster literature.

In contrast, Masaishi Ishii's short story *Lulu* explores psychological trauma and healing within the seismic context through a surreal narrative. The story unfolds from the perspective of a dog named Lulu, set in an evacuation shelter. A large room filled with cots houses children who have lost their homes in the disaster. Each night, transparent women descend from above, comforting the children like mothers. The author implies these figures are spirits of those lost in past catastrophes, now watching over a new generation of victims.

During her nightly rounds, Lulu notices that some children never receive these ethereal visitors. These particular children remain perpetually curled on their beds, trapped in silent despair. One girl's condition is especially severe—a terrifying black hole lies concealed beneath her sheets. This void emanates a force that threatens to consume everything, from within which echo "screams reminiscent of the infernal fires of Buddhist hell." The narration continues: "Amid the surrounding darkness, the apocalyptic scene that had assaulted the girl that day materialized before one's eyes." [1]

Recognizing their profound distress, Lulu initiates her own form of therapy by crawling into the arms of these neglected children, allowing them to channel their inexpressible anguish through the repetitive, soothing motion of stroking her fur. She thus embarks on a mission of traumatic healing, repeatedly diving into the children's internal voids to search for fragmented, positive memories within the deepest darkness, offering temporary respite from their consuming trauma.

The story leaps forward twelve years. The thirty-two children from the shelter reunite, now functioning as pediatricians, construction workers, young wives—their professional identities symbolizing the restoration of social functioning and the reconstruction of life's order. This allegorical exploration masterfully intertwines the supernatural with psychological realism, presenting a powerful literary model for conceptualizing intergenerational trauma, the persistence of memory, and the possibility of healing through empathetic connection.

The "large room" constructed within the narrative serves as a powerful embodiment of the collective trauma inflicted by the 3.11 disaster. It functions simultaneously as a physical shelter and a psychological space for healing. The adoption of a canine narrator provides a crucial emotional buffer for processing the heavy subject matter, thereby allowing for a presentation of trauma that is both nuanced and profoundly authentic. The surreal element of the "transparent women," imbued with a distinct maternal tenderness, projects a profound societal yearning for spiritual solace in the

aftermath of catastrophe. The professional identities of the thirty-two survivors symbolize the restoration of social function and the re-establishment of daily order. Ultimately, the story suggests that while the "ruins continue to pile up at the foot of the port and the hillock" [1]—meaning the trauma of the disaster cannot be erased—it becomes woven into the fabric of an emerging future.

Mai Ishizawa's disaster novel *The Place Beyond the Shell*, recipient of the 165th Akutagawa Prize in 2021, transcends the conventions of a mere "disaster memoir." It emerges, instead, as a complex polyphonic narrative of seismic trauma. The protagonist, a young Japanese woman studying abroad in Göttingen, Germany, has long repressed her memories of the disaster. Their return is triggered by the sudden appearance of Nojima, a university classmate who lost his entire family in the earthquake and now manifests as a "ghost" in her European city. His presence not only forces the protagonist's fragmented memories into coherence but also precipitates a series of uncanny phenomena in Göttingen: the pet dog of her roommate, Agatha, repeatedly unearths old objects bearing traces of daily life from the forest—evocative remnants that inevitably call to mind the personal effects of victims that crossed oceans after 3.11.

From the perspective of trauma representation, the novel's most profound breakthrough lies in its translation of abstract psychological trauma into tangible "body memory." "Body memory is the body's story, a narrative of physical reactions and bodily experiences." [2] In the novel, every inch of the protagonist's skin, every organ, becomes a "storage medium" for disaster memories: her right hand retains the tactile memory of a dog's furry back, calmed during an aftershock; her left hand faintly recalls the red marks and ache from carrying relief supplies in a queue; her ears echo with the deathly silence of post-quake streets and the hushed, fragmented exchanges of people piecing together information; her legs tremble involuntarily on cold nights, as if still standing in the serpentine queues for food; even her nose remembers—the faint aroma of scarce food, the sour odor of bodies gone unwashed, the musty smell of old books in a damp evacuation shelter. [3]

These somatic memories, scattered across the body, are not presented through linear narration. Instead, they surface via a fluid interplay of flashbacks and analepsis, moving freely between the present and the past. This technique not only renders the protagonist's individual trauma palpable and visceral but also refracts the inexpressible collective trauma of the Japanese populace in the Post-3.11 era.

Sigmund Freud's seminal delineation of psychological trauma—characterized by latency, belatedness, and repetition—finds potent illustration within the novel's narrative architecture. For nine years in Göttingen, the protagonist has relied on the fundamental stability of "ground that never shakes." The precariously stacked shelves in German pottery shops and the "still-life-like aesthetics" [3] of streets free from the fear of falling objects become sanctuaries for her repressed trauma, exemplifying its latency. The apparition of Nojima acts as a trigger, abruptly activating dormant memories and plunging her into frequent dreams of that March in 2011, manifesting trauma's belatedness and repetition. The trauma never truly vanished; it merely lay dormant, awaiting a catalyst to resurface through insistent flashbacks.

More profoundly, the novel's exploration of "survivor's guilt" elevates individual trauma into a contemplation of a national collective psyche. As a 3.11 survivor, the protagonist is haunted by an ineffable sense of culpability. Confronted by Nojima's ghost, she dares not ask about the circumstances of his death, even fearing he might see through her years of evasion as a self-styled "bystander." This guilt finds a startling yet profound physical manifestation: "tooth-like scales" [3] erupt on her back. Through this powerful metaphor, Ishizawa suggests the body speaking for the protagonist, giving voice to repressed remorse and anguish, and mirroring a pervasive psychological state in Post-3.11 Japan: the struggle to find a path to reconciliation with trauma through the thicket of survivor's guilt.

While focusing on the collective trauma of the earthquake, the novel simultaneously attends to individual wounds. The "Thursday Society" reading group becomes a crucial vessel for these personal traumas. Twelve-year-old Agnes, ostracized due to her asthma, has developed a cold demeanor; Barbara, a single mother, teeters on the brink under the strain of caring for her ill daughter; Agatha is paralyzed by guilt over her mother's suicide, which occurred under her watch; and Katarina remains trapped in the shadow of her younger brother's early death. These individual sorrows intertwine with the macro-traumas of disaster, pandemic, and war, rendering The Place Beyond the Shell not merely a work of "Post-3.11 Literature" but a

universal narrative about confronting suffering and seeking redemption.

The meticulous crafting of everyday details is a hallmark of this literary mode. These works do not rush to depict the grand tragedy of the disaster itself. Instead, they use quotidian scenes as vessels—scattered papers falling over ruins, the souring taste of rice in a shelter, the sound of broken window frames after an aftershock—transforming them into potent sensory memories that convey the disaster's experience directly to the reader's core. Through this concrete narrative, writers not only reconstruct the scenes of the disaster but also perform an act of mourning for the lost homeland and the departed. In empathizing, the reader, too, participates in this traumatic healing.

Yet, beneath these textual surfaces, a sense of loss is not the final word. Many works, while depicting profound pain, also explore possibilities for spiritual reconstruction. Someone returns to the ruins to plant the first vegetable seedling; another chooses to engrave the names of the lost into poetry; still others see the simple continuation of daily life as the most fitting tribute to the deceased. This spiritual rebuilding shuns grand political slogans, expressing itself instead through minute, fragile gestures that perpetuate life's warmth. As disaster literature demonstrates, the remembrance of home and loved ones is not merely an act of mourning; it is the transformation of loss into a force that sustains life. Within Post-3.11 Literature, this force is endowed with profound emotional cohesion and enduring significance as a historical testament.

3. THE NUCLEAR DISASTER AND ECOLOGICAL AFTERMATH

The destruction wrought by the earthquake and tsunami constituted an immediate, cataclysmic shock, then the Fukushima nuclear crisis represents a protracted, invisible, and fundamentally insidious catastrophe. It has not only forced vast numbers of residents into long-term displacement but has also left an indelible mark of persistent radioactive contamination upon the soil, the ocean, and the entire food chain. This "invisible harm" has shattered public trust in modern technology and energy security, compelling a profound societal re-evaluation of the relationship between humanity and nature, and between technological progress and ethical responsibility. Nuclear power, once emblematic of national prosperity, has been transformed into a latent menace—a shift that Post-3.11 Literature captures and interrogates with intense focus and critical depth.

Following the 3.11 disaster, Hiromi Kawakami promptly revised her 1994 debut short story *Spirit* into Spirit *2011*,which was published in the June 2011 issue of Gunzō. In her afterword, she explicitly cited the direct influence of the Fukushima nuclear accident on this revision. Through nine significant additions and alterations to the original text, she transformed a story originally exploring female consciousness and gender relations into a work reflecting the lived daily reality of the "Post-3.11" era.

The revised work persistently references the impact of "that incident" : after "that incident," only three households remain in the protagonist's apartment building, and one must wear protective gear to go outside; it is the first time since "that incident" that she has ventured out dressed in ordinary clothes with exposed skin; during the evacuation following "that incident," the bear character was helped by someone's uncle; in the years after "that incident," the fields along the road were declared off-limits, and cracks from the earthquake were still visible; before "that incident," the river was full of people swimming and fishing, but now not a single child can be seen. These details weave a metaphoric web of the radiological reality: fields transformed into forbidden zones, river fish becoming toxic mementos, and daily radiation dosage readings evolving into a new kind of life ritual.

When asked why she isn't wearing protective gear on this outing, the protagonist offers a rationalized risk assessment: her "cumulative radiation dosage still had some allowance," the wind was only level one, and there was no wind in that area. This seemingly rational calculation precisely exposes how the nuclear disaster has profoundly reconfigured the fabric of everyday life. In the original, the bear catches fish for "me," which are then cooked and eaten; in the revision, the river fish are contaminated by radiation, and the fish caught by "the bear" can only be dried and hung on the wall as a memorial artifact.

The original "spirit" used the surreal dialogue between a human and a bear to construct a space exploring gender dynamics, hovering between the mundane and the mystical. The revised version, while retaining this narrative frame, implants visceral details like radiation measurements, protective gear, and water contamination, transforming it into an allegorical text of the

nuclear crisis. The newly inserted descriptions of radiation monitors and protective equipment encountered during the walk materialize the invisible nuclear threat into a continuous bodily discipline, thereby deconstructing the myth of "nuclear safety." Rather than adopting a stance of overt polemic, Kawakami focuses on portraying the subtle infiltration of the nuclear catastrophe into daily life. Anxieties manifested in behaviors like repeatedly checking cumulative radiation levels refract the environmental predicament confronting humanity in the Post-3.11 era.

Moto Hagio's short story *Fukushima Ten Nights of Dreams* pays conceptual homage to Natsume Soseki's renowned work Dreams of Ten Nights, recounting ten dreams experienced by a university student while camping in the mountains. Within these dreams, he encounters a strangely featured mountain spirit who prophesies the occurrence of the Fukushima nuclear disaster and its catastrophic consequences. These prophecies include the impending earthquake and tsunami that will strike Fukushima and surrounding regions, the destruction of the nuclear power plant's emergency power systems, the issuance of evacuation orders, explosions at the nuclear facilities, the spread of radiation across the area, and the severe devastation to human life and the ecological environment. Upon waking, the student is overcome with intense unease and terror. He attempts to flee but finds no escape route.

The story, largely conveyed through the student's internal monologue, powerfully illustrates the immense destruction wrought by nuclear contamination upon human existence and the natural world, as well as the profound helplessness and fear people experience when confronted with catastrophe. Narratively, the tale employs an interweaving of dream and reality, imbuing the story with a strong supernatural quality. Through this dream framework, the narrative tightly binds the real and the imagined, reason and emotion, the known and the unknown, resulting in a richly layered and multidimensional literary work. This technique effectively mirrors the pervasive anxiety and the fractured, uncertain reality that characterizes the post-disaster psyche, making the intangible threat of radiation tangibly felt through psychological terror.

Yoko Tawada's novel *The Emissary* employs a dystopian framework to depict the ecological crisis confronting humanity in the aftermath of a nuclear catastrophe. The main island of Honshu experiences severe climatic disruptions: from Ibaraki to Kyoto, heatwaves and sandstorms strike in February while snowfall occurs in August, with summer months alternating between drought and flood, leaving soil severely contaminated. Only Hokkaido and Okinawa maintain agricultural production. Tokyo, the capital, has deteriorated into a desolate wasteland sarcastically referred to as Tokyo Catastrophe. Due to food shortages, taller men are gradually being phased out through natural selection. The environmental crisis has triggered mass animal extinction, leaving spiders and crows as the only commonly visible creatures.

Beyond environmental collapse, human physiology undergoes disturbing transformations: centenarians find themselves robbed of their "ability to die" due to radioactive substances, while children are born perpetually frail and require constant medical care. Although the novel never directly depicts the earthquake or nuclear meltdown, the daily life of an elderly man and his grandson refracts the stark social reality of the post-nuclear world. As scholar Kazuo Kuroko observes: "The Emissary reveals Yoko Tawada's profound despair regarding the Fukushima nuclear accident, a stance wholly aligned with the anti-nuclear/denuclearization movement. It is precisely in this sense that the work is regarded as one of the most representative masterpieces of atomic power literature born from the Fukushima nuclear disaster" [4].

Yūya Satō has maintained a consistent focus on the issue of nuclear contamination in the aftermath of the disaster, with his novel *As Always* standing as a representative work. The narrator, a young mother, ostensibly possesses a nearly perfect family life yet grapples with a dilemma. The spread of nuclear pollution has profoundly impacted ordinary citizens' daily lives—particularly their dietary habits—forcing the young mother into a state of constant anxiety over the safety of her food and water, gradually pushing her toward the brink of collapse.

Regarding the issues of contaminated food and water, the state's propaganda apparatus promotes the message that effects "will not be immediate." The devastating implication, of course, is that infants consuming tainted nourishment daily will inevitably face life-threatening consequences. This powerless mother, shrouded in the shadow of nuclear contamination, functions as a potent symbol for Japan itself—a nation whose government has demonstrated similar impotence and helplessness in

addressing the nuclear crisis. As critic Kimura notes, this novel can indeed be read as an "allegorical fiction" reflecting Japan's national predicament in the post-3.11 era [5].

4. CRITIQUE OF SOCIAL REALITY

In the aftermath of the disaster, the Japanese government's sluggish and opaque response in disaster management and information disclosure elicited significant scrutiny from literary circles. Within "Post-3.11 Literature," this critique of social realities may manifest either through direct forms like public statements and documentary writing, or via more indirect, allegorical modes and dystopian settings. Regardless of the approach, the core of such works remains a persistent reflection on information control, the deficit of democratic transparency, and the constriction of discursive space.

After the 3.11 earthquake, PEN Club has maintained deep concern for the situation in the disaster-stricken areas, particularly the hazards caused by nuclear radiation. On July 15, 2011, it issued the "Petition Statement Calling for Full Disclosure of Information Related to the Great East Japan Earthquake and the Nuclear Power Plant Accident," and on November 16 of the same year, it held a writers' association gathering advocating "the elimination of nuclear power." Just one year after the disaster, it compiled and published a collection of works titled *Now I Oppose Nuclear Power.* In the preface, President Jiro Asada wrote, "Having experienced the tragedy of nuclear weapons, we have now triggered a nuclear accident disaster. Before discussing where responsibility lies, I believe this is a national disgrace and a betrayal of history."[6] The book includes contributions from 51 contemporary novelists, essayists, critics, and poets, many of which possess a critical realism. For instance, Joh Sasaki's *A Reply to Mr. R*, in the form of a letter, profoundly reflects on the historical and cultural roots behind the Fukushima nuclear accident. Under the illusion of the myth of absolute nuclear safety fabricated by so-called national elites, people blindly adhered to the belief in technological supremacy and profit-driven pursuits, ultimately leading to this human-induced disaster. The author argues that the fundamental causes of both the nuclear accident and Japan's wartime crimes during World War II stem from the foolishness and superficiality of the Japanese people. In Takashi Atoda's "The Bell of Fuefuki Pass — A New Translation of *Tales of the Field*, a former flight attendant wife recounts that during turbulence on a plane, she would reassure passengers by saying, "The plane is flying safely, no need to worry," even though this was a deceptive lie. "In the process of deceiving others, not only those around us but even we ourselves come to believe it. If we fail to see the truth, it's over."[6] When the Fukushima nuclear accident first occurred, the Japanese government and TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company) claimed that the situation was under control to alleviate public panic over nuclear leaks, attempting to cover up the truth of the accident. Through this story, the author satirizes the Japanese government and TEPCO's attempts to numb the public with lies. The two-person stage play *Old Man and the Frog* constructs an allegorical space about the truth of the nuclear disaster through a dialogue between an old man and a frog. Through the conversation between a former nuclear power plant worker and a radiation-affected frog, the play achieves a progressive exposure from technical criticism to institutional criticism.

Y ū Nagashima's novel *Answers Without Questions* unfolds its narrative around strangers interacting through a Q&A game on Twitter, centered on various topics. In this game, one person proposes a topic, and others respond with their answers. "These key figures are users with weak-tie relationships on Twitter, and the fragmented nature of Twitter forms the structure of the novel."[7] The beginning of the novel sets the backdrop of the post-earthquake period, with most participants in the Q&A game showing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as an inability to focus on work or long-term depressive symptoms. Among them, the novelist Sasaki, teaching a "literary creation" course at a specialized school, attempts to analyze the tweets of Kato, the perpetrator of the "Akihabara Mass Murder," to deduce his life trajectory and criminal psychology. Kato was a dispatched worker at an automobile factory in Susono City, Shizuoka Prefecture, whose daily routine was confined to a beef bowl restaurant, a convenience store, the factory, and his dormitory—a typical lifestyle of those at the bottom of society.

Since the late 1980s, Japan has experienced an economic bubble, followed by prolonged economic stagnation, leaving young people deeply troubled by employment difficulties. To reduce operational costs, companies rarely offer permanent positions, preferring to hire temporary workers as "dispatched laborers." Kato is a typical example of such a "dispatched worker." These workers face job

instability, low wages, and minimal benefits, making it difficult to achieve a decent middle-class life. Thus, Kato is not an isolated case but represents the social circumstances of a significant portion of the "dispatched workers." His resentment and anger toward society reflect the broader dissatisfaction and rage of the lower strata toward the entire social system.

Police reports cited several factors related to his criminal motives: self-deprecation about his appearance, hatred toward so-called "winners in life," dissatisfaction with his workplace, and deep-seated resentment toward his parents' upbringing. Kato endured an unhappy childhood under strict parental control, reflecting a major flaw in contemporary education—the "educational involution" that damages a child's physical and mental well-being.

As a widely used social tool in Japan, Twitter played a significant role during the special circumstances following the 3.11 earthquake when media access was restricted. It became an important channel for Japanese people to share information and communicate. In daily life, it also serves as a crucial court of public opinion for the lower strata, particularly disaffected youth, to vent their frustrations and voice their grievances. The author of the novel clearly recognizes the changes in social interaction patterns brought about by Twitter. The characters in the story are almost daily immersed in linguistic games on Twitter, with no other social-appearing—Twitter becomes their sole means of social interaction.

While the Akihabara Mass Murder may seem unrelated to the post-3.11 theme, Akiko Kimura points out their interconnectedness: "At first glance unrelated real-life incidents are, in fact, an extrapolation of the events following the Great East Japan Earthquake."[7] The Akihabara Mass Murder, as an individual incident, reflects various social ills in contemporary Japan, while the 3.11 earthquake and Fukushima nuclear accident, as collective disasters, also expose numerous societal problems. After such natural and human-made catastrophes, these inherent social issues not only persist but may even worsen, making life increasingly difficult for contemporary Japanese, especially those at the bottom of society. Therefore, this novel focuses on the living conditions of the Japanese people in the "post-earthquake era," making it, in this sense, a genuine work of "post-3.11 literature."

5. PROCREATIVE CRISIS

Works such as Mizuhiro Misumi's *Red Paper*, Sayaka Murata's *Killing for Birth*, *The End of the World,* and *Convenience Store Woman*, and Mika Takebayashi's *Filling the Earth* employ a restrained, dispassionate narrative style that rejects the traditional mystification of female reproduction in literature. These works may be defined as "reproductive novels." For instance, the portrayal of an artificial insemination technician in Takebayashi's writing superficially presents an individual tragedy of a woman who has lost her child, yet it simultaneously maps onto the micro-level implementation mechanisms of national reproductive policies. The technician's professional identity renders them a concrete practitioner of biopolitics, exemplifying the infiltration of what Foucault termed "biopower" into everyday life.

Mizuhiro Misumi's *Red Paper* and Sayaka Murata's *The End of the World* utilize thought experiments to manifest the "personification of unborn life." This endowment of consciousness upon potential lifeforms reveals the blurring boundary between the virtual and the real in contemporary Japanese society. The institutional design of "killing to give birth" in Killing for Birth, the comprehensive abolition of the traditional family in The End of the World, and the government-mandated procreation policy in *Red Paper* collectively constitute an allegorical critique of the extreme ramifications of biopolitics.

In Akiko Shimoju's short story *To You Who Never Came Into This World*, a childfree woman writes a letter to her unborn child. She reflects on her younger self's decision to forgo motherhood due to "anxiety about the era and the future." Following the Fukushima nuclear disaster, witnessing mothers fleeing with their children to safer regions confirms she made the right choice。She predicts increasing numbers of women will make similar reproductive choices. "We must take responsibility. Now we must resolve to oppose nuclear power plants—otherwise, we cannot face you, who never came into this world.[6]" The narrative powerfully articulates how nuclear anxiety directly reshapes reproductive decisions, framing the personal choice of childbearing as an act of political and ethical consequence in the post-3.11 landscape.

Mieko Kawakami's *March Yarn* employs a narrative framework of a couple's journey during late pregnancy, constructing a tension-laden dynamic between mundane daily life and latent

crisis. The text's most potent dramatic configuration lies in the expectant mother's profound interrogation of procreation itself. Her question—"Is being born in such a place truly a good thing?" [6] — transcends personal reproductive anxiety, ascending to the level of metaphysical inquiry into the very justification of human existence. Under the specter of the Fukushima nuclear disaster, the arrival of new life ceases to be purely celebratory, becoming instead saturated with trepidation about an uncertain future.

The depiction of the "yarn-world" dream sequence constitutes the text's most semantically dense passage. In this universe composed entirely of yarn, all matter can be unraveled and reconstituted, reverting to its fundamental linear state when crisis looms. This intricate imagery invites multiple hermeneutic possibilities. The yarn's pliability and malleability suggest the coexistence of human fragility and resilience, while its capacity for both weaving and unraveling serves as a powerful metaphor for the profound collective anxiety regarding cyclical destruction and reconstruction in the post-disaster era.

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Motoko Arai's trilogy exploring the intertwined themes of procreation and eschatology constitutes a coherent intellectual project spanning the period before and after the 3.11 disaster, examining the possibilities of human reproduction from multiple dimensions. The first work *In the Heavenly Realm*(2007), is set in the mid-22nd century where humanity faces extinction due to a catastrophic decline in birth rates. The protagonist is an artificial life form designed to witness and oversee the end of humankind. Notably, society as a whole does not exhibit violent resistance or panic in the face of impending doom, but rather accepts this fate with a "strange tranquility". Although written before the disaster, this work possesses a distinctly premonitory quality: it prefigures a scenario where humans choose not to reproduce and introduces the concept of "non-human successors," thereby interrogating whether genetic continuity constitutes the sole legitimate form of civilizational transmission. With her characteristically detached prose, Arai fixes her gaze upon the philosophical propositions of "procreation" and "the end," establishing the philosophical underpinnings for her subsequent works.

Her second work *Eri* (2012), depicts a future world where prospective parents must undergo multiple simulated life tests before procreation. After experiencing various potential life trajectories of her hypothetical daughter Eri, through technological simulation, the protagonist ultimately chooses to terminate the pregnancy. Before the medical abortion, she silently bids farewell to the never-to-exist Eri in her heart. This process — simulating futures, making reproductive decisions, and ultimately refusing to assume that responsibility — vividly illustrates the complex consequences of technology's deep intrusion into bioethical considerations. Set against the backdrop of the post-disaster era, this technological imagination of foreseeing the future carries profound contemporary resonance, reflecting society's deep-seated anxiety towards an uncertain future. The narrative powerfully interrogates the

ethical ramifications of predictive technologies while capturing the psychological tremors of a generation grappling with existential uncertainty.

The third installment *Facing the Future* (2014), features a protagonist who navigates dreamscapes into past worlds in a desperate attempt to save her prematurely deceased daughter, Kanae. Employing a parallel-worlds framework, the narrative underscores a tragic inevitability: even successful rescue missions in alternate realities cannot alter the irrevocable fact of her daughter's death in her own world. Ultimately, the protagonist's journey culminates not in altering destiny, but in a hard-won reconciliation with reality itself. This resolution marks a significant philosophical pivot within the trilogy—from technological intervention and ethical refusal toward a stoic acceptance of loss, thereby completing Arai's profound meditation on grief, powerlessness, and the boundaries of human agency in the face of irreversible events.

This trilogy constitutes a complete philosophical inquiry sequence, whose internal logic can be summarized as follows: from the existential choice of "whether to procreate," through the techno-ethical dimensions of "how to procreate," ultimately arriving at the fundamental question of "whether procreation holds meaning." Through this three-part work spanning the seismic disaster period, Arai Motoko not only responds to widespread societal concerns regarding reproduction in the post-disaster era but, on a deeper level, explores multiple possibilities for the continuation of human civilization. Tracing this intellectual trajectory—from the pre-disaster calm foresight of human extinction, to the post-disaster technologized reflections on reproductive choices, and finally to philosophical meditations on loss and memory — reveals the profound insight contemporary Japanese literature demonstrates when confronting the crises of modernity.

The emergence of the procreation theme in post-disaster Japanese literature reflects profound transformations in the nation's bioethical consciousness following the catastrophe. Through literary explorations of procreation, writers not only respond to visceral anxieties over radiation but also employ science-fictional thought experiments to offer unique perspectives on the bioethical dilemmas characterizing the Post-3.11 era. The significance of these works lies not merely in their acute documentation of post-disaster realities, but more importantly in their scientized treatment of procreation—establishing a crucial creative paradigm for how contemporary literature might intervene in modern debates surrounding techno-ethics and bioethics. This corpus demonstrates Japanese contemporary literature's enduring engagement with fundamental questions of corporality, desire, and life itself, manifesting both continuous philosophical reflection and innovative expression.

Post-3.11 Literature distinguishes itself by moving beyond mere documentation of the disaster's immediate devastation to probe its lingering psychological aftershocks. It articulates this exploration through several core thematic constellations: first, earthquake trauma and recovery, where works often depict towns erased by the tsunami, expressing mourning for the deceased and attempting to reconstruct emotional bonds in the aftermath; second, the nuclear catastrophe and ecological crisis, which manifests a profound critique and distrust of modern technological civilization—particularly nuclear power—thereby deconstructing the myth of nuclear safety; third, the critique of social reality, exposing the Japanese government and corporate interests' attempts to obscure the truth of the nuclear accident and manipulate public discourse; and fourth, procreative anxiety, reflecting fundamental shifts in life ethics within post-disaster Japanese society.

In summary, the 3.11 disaster inflicted a profound and pervasive impact on Japanese society, permeating its very fabric. As a concentrated artistic manifestation of this impact, Post-3.11 Literature gives voice to the psychological trauma of the Japanese people, mirrors the new social dynamics of the Post-3.11 era, and has thereby established itself as a distinct literary category. In doing so, it has made a significant and unique contribution to the global corpus of disaster literature.

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