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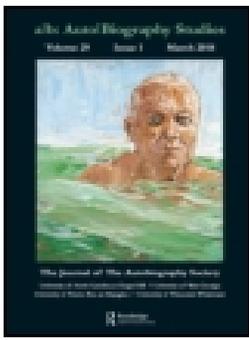
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Fabien Arribert-Narce

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Narrating Fukushima: The Genre of “Notes” as a Literary Response to the 3|11 Triple Disaster in Hideo Furukawa’s *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure* (2011) and Michaël Ferrier’s *Fukushima: Récit d’un désastre* (2012)

By Fabien Arribert-Narce 

ABSTRACT

This essay examines two unclassifiable texts—interweaving the genres of the essay, novel, poetry, and life writing—published in Japanese and in French in the aftermath of the triple disaster that hit Japan on 11 March 2011. These post-Fukushima hybrid works by Hideo Furukawa and Michaël Ferrier attempt to narrativize this unprecedented conjunction of natural and man-made catastrophes—which combined the unfathomable damage caused by the tsunami and the invisible nuclear radiation, which both induce a specific challenge in terms of representation—by blending not only the fictional and the documentary, but also the personal and the collective, via a plurality of voices (including those of victims met in the Fukushima region in 2011). This allows them to develop a critical, (bio)political, and historical perspective on these events, their causes, and their consequences, and to counter nationalist and, at times, misleading official discourses conveyed by the Japanese central state and the media. By so doing, they directly follow in the footsteps of trailblazers of disaster literature and of the composite genre of “notes” in the twentieth century, most notably Kenzaburō Ōe and Svetlana Alexievich, the authors, respectively, of *Hiroshima Notes* (1965) and *Voices from Chernobyl* (1997).

KEYWORDS

disaster literature; Fukushima; nuclear catastrophe; genre of “notes”

The Belarusian journalist and writer Svetlana Alexievich—winner of the 2015 Nobel Prize in Literature and author of *Voices from Chernobyl: The Oral History of a Nuclear Disaster* (1997)—declares in a biographical note published on her website, “Reality has always attracted me like a magnet, it tortured and hypnotized me, I wanted to capture it on paper. So I immediately appropriated this genre of actual human voices and confessions, witness evidences and documents. This is how I hear and see the world—as a chorus of individual voices and a collage of everyday details.

CONTACT Fabien Arribert-Narce  F.Arribert-Narce@ed.ac.uk

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... In this way I can be simultaneously a writer, reporter, sociologist, psychologist and preacher.”¹ By developing this polyphonic writing technique, Alexievich has given a voice to survivors of Chernobyl and other catastrophes and conflicts all over the former Soviet Union. In this respect, her work is a cornerstone of disaster literature (especially in the context of nuclear accidents), and the genre of collective testimony she has explored is a relevant model and an explicit reference for several writers who have addressed the triple disaster that hit Japan on 11 March 2011: first, a magnitude 9 earthquake, then a tsunami that killed up to twenty thousand people in the Tōhoku (northeast) region, and finally a major accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant.

Whereas the expression “3|11” (or “post-3|11”—i.e. 11 March) literature is more common in Japan, these writings are usually referred to in the West as “Fukushima” writings, even if Fukushima is only the name of the damaged nuclear station and of the prefecture in which it is located, and does not refer strictly speaking to the earthquake and tsunami that have affected other areas on the Pacific coast of northern Japan. These terminological differences are significant as they show that it was the nuclear accident that attracted more attention in western societies, which were anxious about the global impact on the environment. A large number of 3|11 texts were published in Japan but also in France and the anglophone world, such as William T. Vollmann’s *Into the Forbidden Zone: A Trip through Hell and High Water in Post-Earthquake Japan* (2011), Gretel Ehrlich’s *Facing the Wave: A Journey in the Wake of the Tsunami* (2013), Lucy Birmingham and David McNeill’s *Strong in the Rain: Surviving Japan’s Earthquake, Tsunami and Fukushima Nuclear Disaster* (2012), and the collected volumes *2:46. Aftershocks: Stories from the Japan Earthquake* (2011) and *March Was Made of Yarn: Writers Respond to Japan’s Earthquake, Tsunami and Nuclear Meltdown* (2012), edited by David Karashima and Elmer Luke. In France, the numerous reactions to the triple catastrophe of March 2011 can be explained not only by the ancient interest in Japanese art and culture initiated by the tradition of *japonisme* in the nineteenth century, but also, and perhaps above all, by the preponderance of a nuclear industry in both countries—there are currently fifty-eight nuclear reactors operating in France, and there were fifty-four in Japan before the accident of 2011, despite the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 that caused a widespread opposition to this energy in the archipelago after World War II.²

These post-Fukushima writings produced in Japan and the West have had various objectives, ranging from “protest” to “healing.”³ They have given a voice to anxieties caused by this unprecedented conjunction of events; they related the victims’ experiences and analyzed the short- and

long-term causes and consequences of the three catastrophes; and they conveyed data and information that were often obliterated in official discourses. Many authors felt compelled to find an appropriate language to write about Fukushima, a language freed from the terminology employed by the Japanese central government and mass media, and capable of reasserting the power of words and literature to counter the dominance of images, be they television footage or photographs and videos posted on the Internet and shared on social media. As Doug Slaymaker rightly noted, “with the capabilities of cell phones, 3/11 is the first obsessively recorded disaster, recorded in real time, and now available online.”⁴

The triple disaster of March 2011 is particularly difficult to apprehend for writers and artists, as it collides two kinds of “unrepresentability.” The tremendous damage caused by the earthquake and tsunami was literally unconceivable and inspired an overwhelming sense of desolation. Then, compounding this sense of desolation, there is the invisible pollution—radiation—caused by the nuclear crisis, which has had a major impact on everyday life in the Tōhoku region, and which creates a specific kind of anxiety. Various literary devices have been used to address these issues in multiple forms and genres, including essays, diaries, poems, and fictional and nonfiction prose works.

The two texts that will be discussed in this essay are Hideo Furukawa’s *Umatachi yo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* (*Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure*, 2011) and Michaël Ferrier’s *Fukushima: Récit d’un désastre* (*Fukushima: Story of a disaster*, 2012), which is not available in English translation. These two hybrid, genre-defying works, which are among the most powerful literary responses to Fukushima published to date, explore new forms of writing directly inspired by the unprecedented circumstances of March 2011, and aptly express the tension and chaos that characterized the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Combining autobiographical factual accounts and elements of fiction, they engender a prose whose primary aim is to portray and resist the devastation caused by this conjunction of natural and man-made disasters. Ferrier described the unique quality of this prose by making reference to the structure of the Matsushima Bay in Tōhoku, which is composed of hundreds of small islands, which broke the waves of the tsunami and prevented massive damage in March 2011: “Writing, then, with estuaries and small islands, with small surging notes, sharp, black or white, both wild and neat.”⁵ This is reminiscent of Ryōichi Wagō’s 3|11 writing, this Fukushima-born poet having decided to stay in the region after the triple catastrophe to tweet about his experiences. His tweets—which gathered thousands of followers—were republished in June 2011 under the title *Shi no tsubute* (*Pebbles of poetry*) and reflect in

Wagō's work a sense of urgency and immediacy, as well as the need for a new kind of writing style to capture the realities of the destruction.⁶ As the critic Tamaki Tokita suggested, "Wagō's goal in his post-3/11 writing has been to engage with reality more directly than does his traditional poetry. 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 poetry—rebuilding his poetry from the debris, pebble by pebble."⁷

The aim of this essay is to explore this specific genre of 3|11 writing based on "notes" (or "pebbles") by successively considering the examples of Furukawa and Ferrier, and by locating them within the wider framework of disaster literature. Both authors question in their work the very possibility to write about Fukushima and to articulate these events in a literary text; well aware of the ethical issues at stake in this context, in particular when it comes to producing fiction on such catastrophes, they also show the extent to which the triple disaster requires a kind of writing that challenges traditional genre distinctions and resists the narrative form itself.

Personal, Regional, and National Identity on the Fault Line: The Return of Fiction, History, and Politics in Hideo Furukawa's 3|11 Writing

In *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure*, the first book published by Furukawa after the events of March 2011, and written in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake (it was released in July 2011), this novelist, born in the region of Fukushima, repeatedly asks what it is still possible for him to write after the catastrophe. Best known as a fantasy author, Furukawa is especially concerned about the sustainability and pertinence of his characteristic fantastical style. His work simply could not be produced and received as it was before, and he felt compelled to reinvent himself as a writer to respond to the chaos in his native region: "Fiction, or anything that requires planning and then writing, was out of the question. I couldn't write. I couldn't see my way to writing. OK, not exactly unable to write. ... I 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."⁸ Furukawa, who was in Kyoto when the earthquake and tsunami happened (more than 500 kilometers away from Fukushima), clearly expresses here the urgency he felt to write about the visions of horror and worrying news he could see on

the television, without knowing, however, which form would be appropriate to convey such reflections and images. He felt helpless as a novelist, as a fiction writer. When asked in April 2011 to choose one of his texts for a public reading organized in support of the tsunami victims, Furukawa started to measure the challenge he would have to address from now on: “I had to read in a voice, and from a text, that might reach the disaster area in Tōhoku. But from what I had written in the past, what words would work in this situation?”⁹ As his English translator remarked, Furukawa’s book “captures the sense that all the important things of a day before—all the major novels to be written, for example—were suddenly proved meaningless, ephemeral, and, somehow, devoid of importance.”¹⁰

Being fully aware of the impossibility—perhaps the futility—for him to write fiction in this context, Furukawa opens *Horses*, *Horses* with a factual, diary-like account of what he felt during the first days that followed the earthquake, from the relative safety of his hotel in Kyoto. He emphasizes in particular the sense of guilt that overwhelmed him at the time, which is a common feeling expressed in post-disaster and testimonial literature: “why am I not among the victims? All of those people *over there* are swallowed by death, touched and caressed by the god of death, but me? How did I get off not dying? Guilt. To overdo the description, guilty conscience. Why is it that all those people *over there* had to be victims?”¹¹ He even goes further by mentioning that he could hear a voice in March 2011 urging him to go to the damaged areas in Fukushima Prefecture: “‘Go.’ There was the voice. ‘You must go there. Inside the concentric circles.’ ... ‘Go. Get yourself radiated.’ Or perhaps just, ‘Go. See.’”¹²

To describe what he experienced during this confused period, when time seemed out of joint, Furukawa uses the Japanese expression *kami-kakushi*, which literally means “abducted by gods” and designates a state of profound lethargy—in this case, a sense of being disconnected from reality after having relentlessly watched television and Internet broadcasts to follow the evolution of the Fukushima disaster: “The only phrase I can think of that captures the experience: ‘time is extinguished’. To phrase it more concretely, consciousness of the date on the calendar, the day of the week, has collapsed. I think I can put a name to it: ‘Spirited Away’. Abducted by spirits. When a person is spirited away, seven days are experienced as half a year; three months feel like a matter of seconds. Time can’t be accounted for, it’s impossible to measure.”¹³ Caught up by the disasters, Furukawa also tries to reflect in his text the incessant aftershocks that imposed a new rhythm on everyday life in Japan in spring 2011, which can be evidently felt in his fragmented and nervous prose.¹⁴ The witness and “novelist unable to write novels” who he has become due to circumstances writes his retrospective narrative of the disaster(s) in reverse chronology, starting exactly one month after the earthquake, on 11 April

2011.¹⁵ This narrative is haunted by texts written by the author before the catastrophe and, above all, by one of his novels published in 2008, *Seikazoku* (The holy family), a sprawling work that follows the road trip of two brothers across the northeast region of Japan—that is, Furukawa’s native region that was hit by the 3|11 disasters. *Horses, Horses* even opens with a brief scene that is explicitly self-referential in which the two brothers are involved, which suggests that Furukawa was profoundly troubled by the numerous coincidences that exist between his fictional (and often prophetic) works and reality—in this case, a horrific reality.

Less than a month after the earthquake and tsunami, Furukawa decided to go himself to the damaged areas in northeast Japan, accompanied by three members of his publishing house. The story of this road trip along the Pacific coast of Tōhoku—which mirrors the trip of the two brothers in *Seikazoku*—unfolds in the second part of *Horses, Horses*. Whereas the first part of the book focuses on the earthquake and its aftershocks, this second part is a plain and poignant description of the endless damage caused by the tsunami. The narrator frequently comments on the limits of writing and literature, which cannot account for this immense, inconceivable spectacle of desolation: “We were overwhelmed by the sense of how powerful it was. The scene spread out before us, everything wiped clean away. Such power, to wipe out everything. There are no words for it. We didn’t just feel it, we were pummeled by it. I am ashamed to admit it—I want to spit at myself in disgust—but I was looking at the scene as though it were a great spectacle. I thought of air raids. And atomic-bomb sites.”¹⁶

However, halfway through this narrative, Furukawa suddenly gives a fictional twist to his text when the character of the elder brother in the novel *Seikazoku* appears in the back seat of his car as he makes his way north along the coast of the Fukushima region: “There is this command: ‘Write’. OK. I will write this. I am writing: Inuzuka Gyūichiro was there. A fifth passenger. The fifth person in our party. ‘Write’: The oldest brother of *The Holy Family*, the one with ‘dog’ [*inu*] in the family name and ‘cow’ [*gyū*] in the given name, 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 Having made, in the first part of the book, various allusions to his inability to write fiction and to the (impossible) novel he could nevertheless imagine to write, Furukawa eventually initiates a fictionalized first-person narrative that lies between autofiction and magical realism. This narrative, marked by its dreamlike tone and conflation of multiple voices, places, and temporalities, is then

continued until the end of the book, although it is interrupted on several occasions by factual accounts of the writer's trip across Tōhoku. In this respect, the second part of *Horses, Horses* is not only a 3|11 document and record of the threefold disaster, but can also be considered as a sequel to the novel *Seikazoku* at an embryonic stage. By resorting to this literary device, Furukawa was able to liberate his writing, which was, so to speak, blocked since the beginning of the catastrophe, and to use his imagination again to respond to the disastrous situation as a novelist.

But *Horses, Horses* is also a text that is politically committed in several ways, openly criticizing the Japanese nation-state as it was established at the end of World War II. The social system on which this state is built has indeed made possible the power of the nuclear lobby and led to the construction from the 1960s of dozens of reactors in a country struck by regular earthquakes and tsunamis, without the active support of the population. The numerous flaws of the so-called Japanese “nuclear village,” a network of investors, politicians, scientists, media, and private corporations—including the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which managed the Fukushima Daiichi station—were bluntly revealed when the crisis burst out in March 2011. Furukawa also emphasizes the fact that the entire electric output produced by the Fukushima nuclear plant was destined for Tokyo, thereby expressing a clear sense of injustice. In his view, his native region of Tōhoku has always been despised and exploited economically and politically by the Japanese central state. Confirming this claim, the scholar Takeshi Kimoto suggested that “[w]hat this triple disaster dramatized is the fact that Tōhoku, or Japan's northeast, has occupied a peripheral place in Japan and its history. In modern times, this agricultural region often had to sacrifice itself for the industrial development of the nation, providing labour, food, and raw materials. The Fukushima Daiichi plant is a case in point. Operated by the Tokyo Electric Company, it supplies energy for the greater Tokyo area. Fukushima prefecture, however, belongs to the area of the Tōhoku Electric Company, within the system of a government-granted regional monopoly of energy production and distribution by nine private companies. That is to say, Fukushima suffers from the consequences of the nuclear accident on behalf of the metropolitan population.”¹⁸

This political and historical dimension of Furukawa's book is introduced via the example of horses, which have been present in northeastern Japan—a region renowned for horse breeding—for centuries and were the victims of the folly of men on countless occasions; thousands of Tōhoku horses (and soldiers), for instance, have died of starvation or been killed in wars led for or against the Japanese central state since the sixteenth century. This is the reason why Furukawa refers to horses in the title of

the work, this animal being for him a symbol of the oppression of his native region over the centuries (to the point of being perceived as an “internal colony,” underdeveloped, and peripheral),¹⁹ and of the cupidity and insensitivity of the industrious man and Japanese state.²⁰ He describes several instances of animals being abandoned in the Fukushima area after the nuclear meltdown: “All the people have been chased away. Towns have been abandoned. All the dogs and cats, and cows, and the horses, too. There is not even any effort made to dispose of the dead bodies. All abandoned.”²¹ Meditating on precepts of the Shinto religion, he suggests that mankind has failed to assume its responsibility to preserve and protect nature and animals, now back to a state of semi-wilderness after the nuclear catastrophe.²² By sharing their suffering in his text, which is, according to his English translator, “haunted by guilt and paralysis” in its first part as we have seen, Furukawa also finds a way back into writing, “action and sensibility”:²³ “I wanted to explain to the horses that the radiation in the air is impossible to see, but it can’t be done. No way to tell them, on this clear day, in the middle of the day, that there is invisible matter in the air sending out invisible particles, coming out of the sky right now. The light, being light, is invisible. Even on such a bright clear day. Precisely because it is such a bright clear day.”²⁴ Furukawa’s disjointed prose, combining heartfelt descriptions, critical reflections, and novel-like narratives in a seemingly chaotic fashion, was his way to “represent” the triple catastrophe in its multiple—and at times contradictory, as the ominous bright sky of the previous quotation suggests—aspects and to address the issues it raises in their political and aesthetic dimension. In this respect, *Horses, Horses* fully pertains to the hybrid and polymorphous genre of “notes,” which does not follow a strictly defined pattern in terms of form and content, and which is characterized, first and foremost, by its revolted and resisting style against adversity via the means of both fiction and nonfiction, which it often blends.

Michaël Ferrier’s Portraits of “Half-Life” in Post-Fukushima Japan

Not unlike *Horses, Horses*, which is described by Slaymaker as a “sort of memoir, sort of fiction, sort of essay, something of a road trip, entirely rambling and completely hectic, overwhelmed and overwhelming,”²⁵ Ferrier’s *Fukushima: Récit d’un désastre*—which, despite its title, is not strictly speaking a “story” or *récit*, a term designating in French a personal nonfiction narrative—does not fit clear-cut genre categories, as it also combines factual accounts, lyrical descriptions, philosophical reflections, and elements of fiction. Ferrier, a Professor of French Literature in Tokyo since the 1990s and the author of several novels based on his

life experiences in Japan, resumes in this text the autofictional style of writing that characterized his previous literary works.²⁶ His depiction of the earthquake, which happened while he was in his Tokyo house with his girlfriend, is therefore anchored in a familiar and intimate atmosphere that is immediately identifiable by readers of his earlier texts. This meticulous description, which occupies one-third of the book, makes the violence of the earthquake and aftershocks felt all the more vividly as it is set in a quotidian setting, suddenly interrupting the daily activities of a regular Tokyoite.

Similarly to Furukawa's *Horses, Horses*, and unlike a majority of texts describing the triple disaster that hit Japan in 2011, Ferrier's *Fukushima* interweaves a detailed depiction of what the narrator experienced with a fiction-like plot. The subplot of the love affair with the female character Jun, who accompanies the narrator throughout this story of a disaster, expresses well the sense of urgency and the intensity that characterized this period of turmoil, without affecting the veracity of the testimony. Ferrier therefore uses a combination of literary devices—the writing styles adopted ranging from documentary description to impassioned protest, expanding on a multilayered narrative structure—as well as a large number of archives, data, and testimonies, to make his telling of what he saw, heard, and felt in spring 2011 more forceful. In this respect, he follows directly in the footsteps of Kenzaburō Ōe, a tireless opponent of nuclear power and laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1994. In *Fukushima*, Ferrier explicitly presents Ōe's *Hiroshima nōto* (*Hiroshima Notes*, a landmark of disaster writing first published in 1965) as a source of inspiration for his own text, and praises this work for its thorough exploration of a nuclear “catastrophe”—the atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945—on an intimate and collective level: “this is why Ōe decided to respond to this dark and proliferating power [nuclear energy] using the genre of ‘notes,’ which he invented for the occasion. A vivid, precise, well-documented writing as a response to lies and omissions. An assemblage of concise scenes, based on a thorough field inquiry, to reveal the reality of radiations and their effects, far from the versions of official history. Brief portraits, sketchy and transversal, suggestive anecdotes, extracts from interviews and letters inserted in the text—intrusion of reality into writing—and fragments of poems torn in shreds to give a voice to ordinary victims, to people injured or trapped by the system, even to animals if needs be.”²⁷ These remarks on “notes” writing seem to correspond exactly to Ferrier's own text, which belongs, according to the author, to “a genre in which poetry, autobiographical and essayistic writing are intertwined in the same form.”²⁸ The literary filiation between the two authors was confirmed by the title chosen for the Japanese translation of Ferrier's book, *Fukushima nōto*, which is a direct reference

to Ōe's *Hiroshima nōto*, published almost fifty years earlier. Of course, the echo between the two titles also suggests a sense of fatal repetition in Japan's recent history, emphasizing a failure to learn from the lessons of the past—"History Repeats," to use the title of an article published by Ōe in the *New Yorker* on 28 March 2011.²⁹

Ferrier's text is made up of three main sections dedicated, respectively, to the earthquake, the tsunami, and the nuclear disaster; it opens and closes with a brief "prologue" and "epilogue" that focus on the invention of the world's first seismometer—which could determine the cardinal direction of an earthquake 500 kilometers away—by Zhang Heng, a Chinese polymath who lived during the Han dynasty (second century ad). This framing literary reference distances *Fukushima* from the immediate description of the disasters that hit Japan in 2011, and contributes to the complexity of its narrative structure—although it was published only one year after the triple catastrophe, it is much more than a raw document, written *sur le vif*. The first part of the book focuses, as mentioned, on the earthquake and the weeks that followed. Ferrier highlights the material, symbolic, and psychological damage caused by the seismic tremors, their visible and invisible consequences, stressing in particular the tremendous noise that accompanied the quakes. In this respect, Philippe Forest described *Fukushima* as a "seismographic novel," characterized by its fragmented writing, which reflects the rhythm of the earthquakes—like Furukawa's text—and allows the author to "record in his body and his prose" the violence of the disaster.³⁰

In the second part of the book, entitled "Récits sauvés des eaux" ("Stories saved from the water"), Ferrier—the narrator—relates the trip he made with his girlfriend Jun to the Tōhoku region almost two months after the earthquake, driving along the coast devastated by the tsunami in the pickup he rented for the occasion, loaded with food and medical supplies. In this section, Ferrier collects the stories of the victims and evacuees he met during his trip, making their voices heard in the text. His description of the tons of debris that covered the lands he drove by is marked by repetition and endless lists of things seen, which is another common trope in (natural) disaster narratives—similar enumerations can be found in the works by Alexievich and Furukawa already mentioned in this essay. Authors face an unavoidable issue in this context: How can a writer portray the extent of the damage observed and give a sense of the annihilated landscapes stretching out as far as the eye can see?

The challenge of representing the unrepresentable is doubled in this case by a second one: making tangible the invisible nuclear pollution whose effects are only revealed over time. This is precisely what Ferrier endeavors to achieve in the final part of *Fukushima*, which depicts the impact on everyday life of the Daiichi nuclear power plant accident—among other issues, a constant fear of levels of radiation, measured with Geiger dosimeters and dependent on changing meteorological conditions (winds, rains,

etc.). Entitled “La demi-vie, mode d’emploi” (“Half-life: A user’s manual”), an ironic reference to the title of Georges Perec’s 1978 novel *La vie mode d’emploi* (*Life: A User’s Manual*) and to the scientific notion of “half-life”—used in nuclear physics to quantify radioactive decay—this section of Ferrier’s text transcribes the unfathomable amount of random figures and confusing news that were communicated by legal authorities in the aftermath of the catastrophe, which he analyzes as a deliberate smoke screen: diffusing flows of incomprehensible and contradictory figures in multiple units of measurement amounts to a withholding of information.

Ferrier also stresses the sudden and obsessive use in the media of the term “half-life,” which he considers, for his part, with a pinch of salt and defines as follows: “getting used to a constrained existence (deprived of its most simple pleasures: eating one’s salad without fear, standing smiling in the rain), to a confined life, precarious and scattered, so that the nuclear industry can carry on its activities as if nothing had happened.”³¹ To support his condemnation, Ferrier not only quotes several seismologists and nuclear specialists he interviewed, but also frequently refers to illustrious literary predecessors, be they *japoniste* or Japanophile authors such as Paul Claudel, Maurice Pinguet, or Richard Brautigan, renowned French writers like Arthur Rimbaud, Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and Guy Debord, or Japanese classic authors ranging from Bashō to Akutagawa and Tanizaki. *Fukushima* therefore also resorts to a compound of essayistic, journalistic, and literary means and sources in the face of unprecedented disasters, which justifies its kinship with the genre of “notes,” explicitly claimed by the author himself as we have seen. While documentary accuracy is necessary to anchor the text in the reality of dramatic events, the use of fictional devices is no less needed to give the work a universal dimension and to reach out to readers on both an emotional and intellectual, self-reflexive level. This powerful coalescence of immediacy and distance is what singularizes this trend of disaster literature.

Conclusion

Interestingly, Ferrier decided not to insert in his book any of the numerous pictures he took during his trip across Tōhoku in spring 2011, unlike other post-Fukushima writers, such as Kiyoshi Shigematsu in his “documentary novel” *Kibō no chizu* (*Map of hope*, 2012). Instead, he trusted in the power of words and literature to express a singular point of view on the ongoing situation in northeast Japan, and to compose a less immediate account than the flow of images that accompanied the three catastrophes—a kind of deliberately “slow mediation” as a remedy against contemporary hyper-mediatization phenomena and the mesmerizing (and prevailing) power of the visual. Likewise, Furukawa detached himself from these viral images of the tsunami and nuclear meltdown to construct

a reflection not only on reality and fiction, but also on history and (writing as a form of) political commitment; his post-3|11 text demythologizes Japan's modern nation-state and the purported unity of the country, which leads him—like Ferrier—to contest official discourses about the triple disaster, as well as authorized (and often nationalistic) versions of state history.

Many comparisons have been made since 2011 between the tragedies of Nagasaki, Hiroshima, and Fukushima. This has brought Japanese writers to reflect on collective and individual responsibility, with some having even expressed a sense of guilt, as we have seen with Furukawa. To quote Haruki Murakami in a speech he gave when he received the International Catalunya Prize in June 2011, “We Japanese are the ones who allowed such a distorted system to operate until now. Maybe we will have to take ourselves to task for tacitly permitting such behavior. This state of affairs is closely linked to our own sense of morals and our personal standards. ... At the same time that we are victims, we are also perpetrators. ... At the same time, in that we are the ones who uncovered the power of the atom, and we have failed to stop the use of that power, we are all perpetrators as well.”³² In *Horses, Horses*, Furukawa deconstructs the alleged unity of this national “we,” preferring instead to single out the responsible entities and mechanisms, and to assume a local, regional identity that is more meaningful to him as a Tōhoku-born author. Reflecting on the role of writers in such a dramatic context, his position also differs from that of Murakami, who claimed in the same speech that “in this great collective effort, there should be a space where those of us who specialize in words, professional writers, can be positively involved. We should weave together with words new morals and new ethical standards. We should plant vibrant new stories and make them sprout and flourish. Those stories will become our shared story.”³³ If Murakami only briefly alluded to the tragic events of March 2011 in the final chapter of his latest novel, *Kishidancho goroshi* (*Killing Commendatore*, 2017), like the return of the repressed or the haunting presence of a ghostly figure, Furukawa's and Ferrier's response to 3|11 consisted in patching together hybrid fragments expressing a sense of urgency, compassion, and indignation, and in blending a plurality of voices, genres, and styles in their respective works. More than “weav[ing] together with words new morals and new ethical standards,” to use Murakami's words, this multifaceted approach between the fictional and the documentary allowed them to develop a (self-)critical and political discourse, which is a defining characteristic of the ragged and raged genre of “notes” analyzed in this article, beyond the formal and thematic differences between the various examples considered.³⁴ By doing so, Furukawa and Ferrier were able to inscribe the words of others and to introduce the

toxic reality of Fukushima in their unclassifiable texts—according to Furukawa, “this contact [with reality] is proof of the best post-3/11 fiction”—following directly in the footsteps of illustrious predecessors such as Ōe and Alexievich.³⁵

University of Edinburgh

Notes

1. See Alexievich's website, *Voices from Big Utopia* (2006), at <http://alexievich.info/en/>
2. Here are some examples of literary works published in French in the aftermath of the catastrophe: Ryōko Sekiguchi's diary, *Ce n'est pas un hasard* (It didn't happen by chance, 2011); Daniel de Roulet's long letter addressed to a Japanese female friend, *Tu n'as rien vu à Fukushima* (You saw nothing in Fukushima, 2011); and Richard Collasse's novel *L'océan dans la rizière* (The ocean in the paddy fields, 2012). For more on this, see Arribert-Narce, “Écrits.”
3. See Gebhardt and Masami, *Literature*, 7–10.
4. Slaymaker, “Gesture,” 195–196.
5. Ferrier, *Fukushima: Récit d'un désastre*, 143; unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. Despite the proximity of Matsushima to the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, the area was protected by the islands and suffered little damage. This group of islands, located in Miyagi Prefecture, is ranked as one of the famous Three Views of Japan and revered nationally.
6. Extracts from Wagō's *Shi no tsubute* have been translated into English by Jeffrey Angles in “Pebbles of Poetry.”
7. Tokita, “Post-3/11 Quest.”
8. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 7–8. “In an interview with Motoyuki Shibata, Furukawa admits that the nuclear disaster temporarily disabled his language as a novelist: ‘The only thing I can do is directly go to the site and explore the possibility of first-person prose.’” See Kimoto, “Post-3/11 Literature,” 16.
9. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 15.
10. Slaymaker, “Translator's Afterword,” 142.
11. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 22.
12. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 25–27.
13. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 3–4.
14. At the beginning of *Horses, Horses*, Furukawa writes, “I began writing this essay on April 11, 2011. I was about ten pages in when there was an aftershock off the coast of Fukushima. Just over magnitude six. Every time there was a strong aftershock, I would revise. The aftershocks left no options. A clear voice: ‘Revise completely and thoroughly’” (8).
15. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 28.
16. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 41–42. Furukawa asks in this respect, “How far should I go in describing all these thousands, tens of thousands, of parts?” (44).
17. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 66–67.
18. Kimoto, “Post-3/11 Literature,” 14.
19. The ancient Yamato Court (sixth-seventh century ad) already regarded people of the region as foreign and sought to subjugate them.

20. The city of Minami-sōma—where the end of Furukawa’s novel *The Holy Family* is set—hosts the famous Soma Wild Horse Chase (Sōma-Nomaoi Festival), which has been designated by the “nation of ‘Japan’ as an ‘Important Intangible Folk Cultural Asset,’” as Furukawa writes with irony in *Horses, Horses* (104). Furukawa also notes that the name “Sōma” itself “seems to mean something like ‘reader of horse physiognomy’” (45). Commenting on the metaphor of the horse used by the poet Wagō (already mentioned in this article) to express the bond between humans and nature in his post-Fukushima poems, Tokita remarks that “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” (“Post-3/11 Quest”). The proximity between Furukawa and Wagō, who were both born in the Fukushima Prefecture in the 1960s, is evident here.
21. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 25.
22. For more on this, see Tokita, “Post-3/11 Quest.”
23. Slaymaker, “Translator’s Afterword,” 142–143.
24. Furukawa, *Horses, Horses*, 48–49. This quotation can be read in relation to the title of the book, *Horses, Horses, in the End the Light Remains Pure*.
25. Slaymaker, “Gesture,” 197.
26. See Ferrier’s *Kizu, la lézarde, Sympathie pour le fantôme*, and *Tokyo, petits portraits de l’aube*.
27. Ferrier, *Fukushima*, 258.
28. Ferrier, *Fukushima*, 259.
29. Tellingly, since March 2011, many Fukushima evacuees have had to face acts of discrimination reminiscent of those experienced by *hibakushas*, the victims of the 1945 atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
30. Forest, “Le roman sismographe,” 166–167.
31. Ferrier, *Fukushima*, 248.
32. Murakami, “Speaking.”
33. Murakami, “Speaking.”
34. This blend of fiction and documentary in a narrative largely based on a trip to the disaster-stricken areas in Tōhoku is not specific to Ferrier and Furukawa, and can, for example, also be found in Shigematsu’s “documentary novel” *Kibō no chizu* (Map of hope), already quoted above and analyzed in depth by Rachel DiNitto in “Literature Maps Disaster.”
35. Qtd. in Kimoto, “Post-3/11 Literature,” 17.

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ORCID

Fabien Arribert-Narce  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6393-3682>

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