

JAPANESE BOOK NEWS

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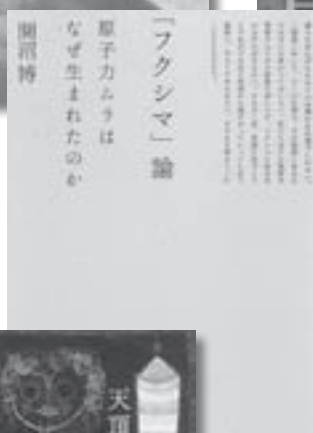
SPRING 2012

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Japanese Literature in the Post-3/11 Era

Is the “Future’s Door” About to Open?

Numano Mitsuyoshi

The earthquake and tsunami that devastated Tōhoku last March and the nuclear crisis that followed continue to affect every aspect of Japanese life. Literature is no exception. Struggling against a despairing sense that this was no time for literature, contemporary writers have responded in a variety of ways since disaster struck on March 11.

Almost immediately, a number of poets responded with lines that were plain, poignant, and fierce. Wagō Ryōichi, a Fukushima-based poet previously known for rather abstruse contemporary verse, suddenly shifted gears after the disaster, using Twitter to publish a succession of short pieces that rapidly gained a substantial following.

“In the end, there are only tears. I want to write furiously, like a man possessed.”

“Radiation is falling. The night is quiet.”

“Every night has its dawn.”

These pieces could hardly be classified as poetry in the conventional sense—the author himself refers to them as “pebbles of poetry” (*Shi no tsubute* [Pebbles of Poetry], Tokuma Shoten). But they moved people with their straightforwardness.

Hasegawa Kai, one of Japan’s leading haiku poets, turned to tanka to express his feelings on the catastrophe, responding to what he described as an “irresistible urge” to write with a relentless surge of poems (*Shinsai kashū* [A Collection of Poems About the March 11 Disaster], Chūō Kōron Shinsha, see *JBN* No. 70).

Do not speak lightly / Of twenty thousand deaths /
Each one of them / A parent or child / A brother or sister

Recovery: / An impressive word and brave / But /
Those who have been lost / Will not return again

What drove this haiku poet to shift to the slightly longer tanka form? Heian-period tanka poet Ki no Tsurayuki famously wrote in the introduction to the *Kokinshū*, the first imperially sponsored collection of verse in Japanese: “Which of all the creatures of this world does not sing?” If we take these words as referring to the universal power of poetry, perhaps we can conclude that the shock of last year’s disaster awoke the spirit of poetry that was lying dormant in Japanese hearts.

Meanwhile, Henmi Yō published a series of vivid, almost grotesque poems titled “*Me no umi—Watashi no shisha tachi ni*” [Sea of Eyes: To My Departed] (*Bun-gakukai*, June 2011). For the author, who grew up in one of the Tōhoku towns devastated by the tsunami, the work is at once an act of mourning, a requiem, and above all, a

poet’s desperate attempt to summon the power of poetic expression and pit it defiantly against the violent forces of the universe.

My departed dead:

You must sing your poems alone.

Let the shore daisies keep from flowering,

Let the yellow plants that cling to the cliffs refrain
from mourning—

Until the right words have been found, each one unique
and singular,

And assigned to the lungs

Of my departed dead.

Novelists have also responded in a variety of interesting ways, albeit somewhat more slowly than the poets. A number of novels written since the disaster show how writers’ imaginations have been tested by the terrible events of 3/11. Here I would like to touch on two outstanding examples: *Uma tachi yo, sore demo hikari wa muku de* [Horses, Even Now the Light Is Still Pure] by Furukawa Hideo (*Shinchō*, July 2011, subsequently published in book form by Shinchōsha) and *Koi suru genpatsu* [Nuclear Plant of Love] by Takahashi Gen’ichirō (*Gunzō*, November 2011, subsequently published in book form by Kōdansha).

Furukawa headed to Fukushima in early April, not long after the earthquake, as if spurred by some kind of urge to self-destruction. He got close to the nuclear plant and describes what he experienced there. The result is more than just reportage. The book is a jumbled mix of reality and fiction, in which Furukawa finds himself joined in his car by characters from *Seikazoku* [The Holy Family], one of the author’s earlier works set in the Tōhoku region. This fusion of fiction and nonfiction was perhaps the only way the disoriented author could deal with the overwhelming reality of what he was witnessing.

With *Koi suru genpatsu*, by contrast, Takahashi Gen’ichirō maintains his position at the vanguard of post-modern Japanese literature, depicting the aftermath of the nuclear accident in typically absurdist, surrealist style. The novel deals with the struggles of a porn film director instructed by his boss to make an adult movie to raise money for the reconstruction effort. The novel takes its title from the film he makes. Some may find the barrage of explicit content in the novel inappropriate or even disrespectful. Personally, I think the author deserves respect for refusing to tone down his usual style even in the face of Japan’s three-pronged disaster. Although the disaster may well have “exposed things that previously lay hidden

in this country,” unspoken taboos still exert a powerful influence over literary expression. Dismantling these taboos is one of the things Takahashi sets out to achieve in this novel.

A remarkable array of nonfiction and commentary has already been published about the disaster. Perhaps the most significant studies to emerge so far are *Fukushima no genpatsu jiko o megutte: Ikutsu ka manabi kangaeta koto* [On the Nuclear Accident in Fukushima: Some Lessons and Thoughts] (Misuzu Shobō) by physicist Yamamoto Yoshitaka and *Nihon no daitenkan* [Transforming Japan] (Shūeisha) by religious scholar Nakazawa Shin'ichi. Although both books discuss the issues of nuclear power from the perspective of each author's area of expertise, both rise above their immediate context to achieve the level of well-written cultural criticism. These two books stand as eloquent testimony to the way in which many people in Japan have worked to develop critical thinking and a distinctive set of values since last March.

Of the literary essays that have appeared so far, the most impressive is *Haru o urandari wa shinai—Shinsai o megutte kangaeta koto* [I Don't Reproach the Spring: Thoughts on the Earthquake] (Chūō



Ikezawa Natsuki's *Haru o urandari wa shinai* [I Don't Reproach the Spring].

Kōron Shinsha), a masterpiece of criticism by the author Ikezawa Natsuki that seems likely to survive as one of the enduring literary documents of last year's events. Containing his rage, the author provides a lucid account of his visits to the stricken areas. Running through the work is a sense of deep empathy with the victims' plight. As well as offering profound literary insights into the Japanese mind, this is a book of cul-

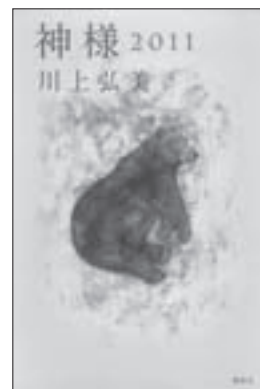
tural criticism underpinned by the author's background in the natural sciences and supported by his keen sense of social mission. The title, incidentally, comes from a poem by the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska called "Parting with a View." The first lines continue as follows:

I don't reproach the spring
for starting up again.
I can't blame it
for doing what it must
year after year.

The poem describes the poet's emotions as the first spring arrives after the death of her husband. But for anyone reading the poem in post-disaster Japan, it is all but impossible to see the lines as referring to anything other than the situation in Tōhoku last spring. Rather than a misreading, I prefer to see this as proof of the universal power of literature to outlive its original time and place and even acquire fresh force in a new context.

Indeed, many works written years ago have gained new meaning in the days since 3/11. The most startling instance is Kawakami Hiromi's "*Kamisama 2011*" [trans.

"God Bless You, 2011"]. The short story "*Kamisama*" was the author's debut work, and originally appeared in 1993. It was a sweet, fairytale-like story in which the first-person protagonist goes hiking along a river with a bear who has recently moved into her apartment building. Shortly after the disaster last year, Kawakami wrote a new version, transplanting the story to the world after the nuclear accident. Overall, there are no major changes to the plot or the writing. And yet everything feels utterly changed. Why? The reason is simple: In the new version, almost everything that appears in the story, including the river itself and the fish that live in it, has been contaminated by radiation. It is remarkable how the same words take on entirely new connotations when they are set in the world after what the story refers to only as "the incident."



Kawakami Hiromi's "*Kamisama 2011*" [trans. "God Bless You, 2011"].

In the foregoing, I have touched on a number of early responses to the disaster—but the truth of course is that literature, and full-length novels in particular, require a longer gestation period. It is still too soon to evaluate the tendencies and achievements of post-3/11 literature. In time, more mature responses will no doubt appear. Ōe Kenzaburō's *In Late Style* may be a harbinger of what is to come. The first installment of the Nobel Prize winner's latest novel, which appeared in the January 2012 issue of *Gunzō*, makes clear that Ōe, after considerable deliberation, has embarked on an attempt to wrestle with the question: What kind of writing is possible in the post-3/11 era? The work takes an unusual format, consisting of the author's own notes interspersed with passages written by three female family members. Although there is no way of knowing how the story will unfold, the first installment contains several tantalizing allusions to Dante, quoting the "future's door" referred to in *The Divine Comedy*. After a disaster on this scale, what kind of future can we look forward to, in our lives and in our literature? Drawing on Dante's words, this is the question that Ōe seems to be asking of himself—and of us.



Numano Mitsuyoshi

Born in Tokyo in 1954. Literary critic and specialist in Russian and Eastern European literature. Studied at the University of Tokyo and Harvard University. Translator and professor in the Department of Contemporary Literary Studies at the University of Tokyo, where he takes a cross-border approach to world literature. Works include *Bōmei bungaku ron* [The Literature of Exile], Sakuhinsha, 2002, winner of the Suntory Prize, *Yūtopia bungaku ron* [Utopian Literature], Sakuhinsha, 2003, winner of the Yomiuri Prize for Literature, and *Sekai wa bungaku de dekite iru* [The World Is Made of Literature], Kōbunsha, 2012. Member of the JBN Advisory Board.

FICTION



Ikeido Jun

Born in 1963. Awarded the Edogawa Rampo Award in 1998 for his debut novel, *Hatsuru soko naki* [Without End], which explored the dark side of banking. Primarily a writer of "business novels," including *Sora tobu taiya* [The Flying Tire] and *Tetsu no hone* [Bones of Steel] depicting a world of product recalls, bid rigging, and corporate intrigue. This book won the Naoki Prize in 2011.

Shitamachi rocketto **[Downtown Rocket]**

By Ikeido Jun

Shōgakukan, 2010. 194 x 134 mm. 415 pp. ¥1,700. ISBN 978-4-09-386292-9.

Working out of a small factory in an unfashionable part of Tokyo, a tiny family firm called Tsukuda Manufacturing succeeds in developing a rocket engine valve based on one of its main products. But at the same time, the company faces an unprecedented crisis, having lost its major client and facing a lawsuit for patent irregularities from one of the industry's biggest players. The rival plans to push Tsukuda Manufacturing into bankruptcy and swallow it up for next to nothing.

With the help of a specialized attorney the company manages to overcome the crisis. But no sooner has the company weathered one storm than another arises when Teikoku Heavy Industries, Japan's largest aerospace manufacturer, makes an offer to buy the patent. The president is determined that the company should

manufacture the components itself rather than selling its rights for short-term profits. But the unprecedented size of the offer provokes a conflict of opinion. Once negotiations start, however, Teikoku's arrogance sparks the employees' sense of pride. Banding together to work on product development, they eventually succeed in launching a domestically built rocket.

The fast-paced storyline makes the book hard to put down. The story is intricately plotted, and Ikeido breathes life into all his characters. The scenario of a small company tyrannized by big business is reminiscent of the good-against-evil theme of popular historical novels. This tale of the weak overcoming the strong through superhuman efforts appeals to Japanese readers' sympathy for the underdog. (Chō)

Mazāzu **[Mothers]**

By Kanehara Hitomi

Shinchōsha, 2011. 196 x 134 mm. 464 pp. ¥1,900. ISBN 978-4-10-304532-8.

Mazāzu [Mothers] is something of a departure for Kanehara Hitomi, who has been electrifying readers with graphic depictions of sexuality and depraved, edgy lifestyles since her debut in 2003. The theme of Kanehara's latest novel—the trials of young mothers struggling to raise small children—is almost classical by comparison. Doubtless it was the author's own experience of marriage, childbirth, and motherhood that enabled her to tackle such a theme head-on.

As the story unfolds, the viewpoint alternates among three young mothers whose children are enrolled at the same daycare center. The first is Satsuki, a fashion model who has a young daughter by her husband and is now pregnant with her lover's child. Then there is Yuka, a writer whose husband comes home only on

weekends, leaving her alone to care for her young child while pressed by deadlines; buckling under the pressure, she resorts to drugs. Ryōko is a stay-at-home mother who is so exhausted that she ends up abusing her own son. What these three disparate characters have in common is the sense of isolation that often afflicts young Japanese mothers obliged to raise children without the understanding and support of their husbands.

Yet Kanehara does not approach her subject matter as an opportunity for a feminist critique of contemporary Japanese society. Her achievement lies in carving out new paths for contemporary fiction through her unflinching exploration of human love and hate, togetherness and isolation. (Numano)



Kanehara Hitomi

Born in 1983. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 2004 for "*Hebi ni piasu*" [trans. Snakes and Earrings]. Other works include *Ōtofikushon* [trans. Autofiction] (see JBN No. 51), *Asshu beibī* [Ash Baby], *Hoshi e ochiru* [Falling into Stars], and *Torippu torappu* [Trip Trap].



Kawakami Hiromi

Born in 1958. Taught high school and junior high school biology after graduating from Ochanomizu University. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 1996 for *Hebi o fumu* [Tread on a Snake] (see JBN No. 18). Awarded the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize in 2001 for *Sensei no kaban* [trans. The Briefcase] (see JBN No. 37). Other works include *Manazuru* [trans. Manazuru] (see JBN No. 52), awarded the Minister of Education's Arts Encouragement Prize in 2007, and *Kazahana* [Whirling Snowflakes], reviewed in JBN No. 58. Member of the Akutagawa Prize selection committee since summer 2007.

Tenchō yori sukoshi kudatte **[Just Past the Zenith]**

By Kawakami Hiromi

Shōgakukan, 2011. 193 x 134 mm. 208 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-09-386304-9.

The seven short stories in this collection feature a variety of female protagonists, from teenagers to women in their forties. Through their narratives, Kawakami conveys the different ways in which women live and love in today's Japan. Although her narratives are realistic in style, they are underpinned by a rich, imaginative sense of playfulness and threaten to float free of conventional reality at any moment. In "Kazumi-chan no koto" [About Kazumi], for example, we are told that Kazumi, a teenage girl attending cram school, is actually a clone. The reader is never quite sure that everything is as it appears to be in the life of this young woman. Each of the stories features a bizarre twist that leaves a sharp impression on the memory. In one we meet a seventeen-year-old girl with an unfortunate

family background who spends her time writing bad acrostic poems to the object of her infatuation ("Yumoresuku" [Humoresque]). In another, we encounter a strange woman who claims to have sprouted a tail ("Eiko-chan no shippo" [Eiko's Tail]). In the title piece, a divorced woman in her forties with a lover eleven years her junior bumps into her son and his girlfriend at a bar. This polished collection is a distillation of the distinctive appeal of Kawakami Hiromi's short fiction. (Numano)

Nazuna

By Horie Toshiyuki

Shūeisha, 2011. 193 x 134 mm. 439 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-08-771377-0.

Social and economic changes in Japan are propelling a gradual shift in gender roles, particularly with regard to childcare. In some cases, the father takes leave to look after the children while the mother continues working. Two signs of this phenomenon are the rise of the punning neologism *iku-men* (men engaged in *ikuji*, or childcare) and the emergence of *iku-men* as fictional protagonists. Horie Toshiyuki's latest novel is an example of an emerging genre, the *iku-men* novel. The main character is an unmarried man working for a regional newspaper, who takes in his infant niece Nazuna when his brother's wife is hospitalized. It is supposed to be a short-term arrangement, but when the child's father is involved in an automobile accident overseas, circumstances conspire to keep the infant in the

protagonist's care much longer than expected. The novel describes the sometimes humorous struggles of a man with no previous childrearing experience to meet the challenges of parenthood. But its real strength lies in its sensitive, lyrical depiction of a new human life from a man's point of view. "The tiny wrinkles in her lowered eyelids filled him with wonder. How gently a baby closed its eyes!" Few novels convey so vividly the preciousness and fragility of life. (Numano)



Horie Toshiyuki

Born in 1964. Besides his work as a writer and translator, also teaches creative writing at Waseda University. Debut novel, *Kōgai e* [To the Suburbs], published in 1995. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 2001 for *Kuma no shikiishi* [The Bear's Paving Stone] (see JBN No. 35). Awarded the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize and the Kiyama Shōhei Literary Prize in 2004 for *Yukinuma to sono shūhen* [Yukinuma and Its Environs]. Won the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2010 for *Seigen kyokusen* [Sine Curves] (see JBN No. 64).



Matsuura Hisaki

Born in 1954. Poet, novelist, and professor at the University of Tokyo, where he teaches cultural theory and French literature. Awarded the Akutagawa Prize in 2000 for Hana kutashi [A Spoiling Rain]. Awarded the Yomiuri Prize for Literature in 2005 for Hantō [The Peninsula] (see JBN No. 43). Other works include Kawa no hikari [Light on the River], reviewed in JBN No. 55.

***Fukanō* [Impossible]**

By Matsuura Hisaki

Kōdansha, 2011. 193 x 137 mm. 256 pp. ¥1,800. ISBN 978-4-06-217028-4.

Fukanō is a novel made up of eight largely independent chapters. The book is based on a bold, shocking premise. The author Mishima Yukio, referred to here by his real name of Hiraoka, is still alive in contemporary Japan, now in his eighties. The real events surrounding Mishima's death on November 25, 1970, are well known. Mishima led members of the *Tate no Kai* (Shield Society), his self-styled private army, into the Ichigaya Camp of the Self-Defense Forces, where he performed hara-kiri after his call for a military coup fell flat. In the novel Mishima is living in Tokyo, where he has been released on parole after 27 years in prison. The first half of the novel depicts the eccentric daily life of Mishima as a wealthy old man. He spends his days turning his basement into a gallery of bizarre installa-

tion art and constructing a 20-meter-tall glass-topped lookout tower in the western part of the Izu Peninsula.

The novel shifts gears suddenly in the second half. Mishima joins a shady society called the Repentant Old Men's Club and gets caught up in a series of bizarre, fantastical events. The novel winds up as a parody of the mystery genre, dealing with an attempt to commit the "impossible crime." With this book, Matsuura succeeds both in coming to terms with the negative legacy of Mishima Yukio and in making clear his critical attitude toward contemporary Japanese civilization. (Numano)

***Jūjū* [Sizzle]**

By Yoshimoto Banana

Bungei Shunjū, 2011. 194 x 133 mm. 160 pp. ¥1,100. ISBN 978-4-16-380650-1.

Mitsuko's parents run a hamburger steak restaurant called Jūjū, meaning "sizzle." After a blissful childhood, she stumbles into a romance with Shin'ichi aged 17 and suffers a miscarriage. When her overworked mother dies of a heart attack soon after, Mitsuko, fresh out of high school, begins working at the restaurant. After Shin'ichi marries another girl named Yūko, Mitsuko finds new meaning in life through a slow-burning love affair with a man called Miyasaka.

Despite the realism of its descriptions, the overall atmosphere evoked by the novel is reminiscent of a fairytale. Although the novel depicts an idealistic world that is the product of the protagonist's fantasies, all the details are realistic events that could easily take place in the real world. The characters are diverse but

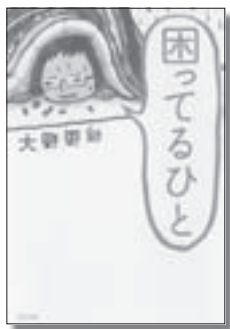
have one thing in common: they are all determined to make the best of life despite the deep emotional scars they carry.

Mitsuko's parents are depicted as perfect, flawless people. They lovingly raise Shin'ichi, who has been abandoned by his own parents, without looking for anything in return. When Shin'ichi's father comes to beg for money, they hardly bat an eye. Instead, they feed him hamburger steak and give him some spending money. Mitsuko's beloved mother is a favorite of everyone who knows her. And then there is Yūko, a character straight out of a fairytale. Nonetheless, there is nothing jarring or unnatural about the storyline or the characters. With a sophisticated touch, the author has written a book that is both fresh and moving. (Chō)



Yoshimoto Banana

Born in 1964. Awarded the Kaien Prize for New Writers in 1987 and the Izumi Kyōka Prize for Literature and the Minister of Education Award for New Artists in 1988 for Kitchin [trans. Kitchen]. Awarded the Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize in 1989 for Tsugumi [trans. Good-bye Tsugumi]. Recipient of numerous international awards, including the Scanno Literary Prize and Fendissime Literary Prize. Won the Capri Award, an Italian literary prize, in 2011. Translations of Kitchin and other works have been published in more than thirty countries.



Ōno Sarasa

Born in 1984. Suddenly overcome by a serious autoimmune disorder in 2008, while studying refugee issues as a graduate student at Sophia University. Currently convalescing and pursuing a writing career. This is her first book.

***Komatteru hito* [People in Trouble]**

By Ōno Sarasa

Poplar, 2011. 187 x 127 mm. 319 pp. ¥1,400. ISBN 978-4-591-12476-5.

Ōno Sarasa is twenty-four years old, a young woman full of curiosity about the world. After growing up in an area of natural beauty, she moves to Tokyo to attend university. An encounter with the problems confronting refugees from Myanmar prompts her to get involved in charity activities in Japan and overseas. One day she suddenly comes down with a serious illness. When her immune system fails to cope with the infection properly, she develops a rash all over and suffers from fever and lethargy. She drifts from one medical facility to another for a whole year, without finding any effective treatment.

Originally published online, this book documents the author's battle with her illness. The author's tone is bright and cheerful, and flecked with humor. Nevertheless, the situation is serious. Ōno strug-

gles against the monster of the excessively complex social security system and is wounded by heartless words from some of the doctors she consults. Even the friends she relies on for support start to tire as her struggle with illness drags on.

The author starts to notice similarities between her own predicament and the contradictions in refugee aid, the topic that was the subject of her academic research. She depicts the shifting emotions of the people around her and the problems in the national system with objectivity. Despite the detached, scholarly approach, the writing is poppy and accessible. Eventually, romance enters her life and she starts down the road to independence. Many readers identified with the author's indefatigable optimism in the face of her difficulties, and the book became a runaway hit. (Yonahara)

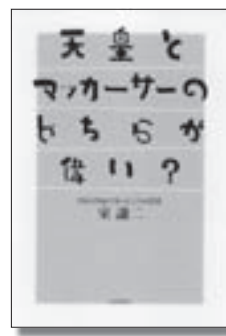
***Tennō to Makkāsā no dochira ga erai?* [Who's Higher Up, the Emperor or MacArthur?]**

By Muro Kenji

Iwanami Shoten, 2011. 188 x 128 mm. 248 pp. ¥2,100. ISBN 978-4-00-024032-1.

Muro Kenji was born in Japan to an English teacher shortly after World War II and grew up during the US Occupation. In this book he illuminates the complex and often contradictory postwar Japanese attitudes to the United States through the lens of his own experiences. He recalls his first exposure to American jazz, the American servicemen he encountered, and his father's work for the Occupation's Civil Information and Educational Section. Later, he takes part in protests against the Vietnam War. In the 1980s, he moves to the United States, and eventually becomes a citizen. Into this narrative Muro weaves a number of fascinating anecdotes and observations, including a particularly interesting discussion of Japanese denial with respect to the war-renouncing Article 9 of the postwar Constitution. Muro observes

that the classic Western *High Noon* was released in 1952, the same year the Occupation ended. The film's basic message, that a leader must be prepared to use violence in defense of justice, flatly contradicts the pacifism of Article 9. As Muro sees it, the Japanese have forgotten that the moral message of *High Noon* can be countered only by a consistent and active nonviolence, rather than a merely passive approach. He argues that pro-American sentiment and anti-Americanism were two sides of the same coin in postwar Japan. His personal account suggests that in addition to providing an impetus for internalizing the American culture of violence, this complex, ambivalent attitude may also form the basis for transcending that culture and embracing nonviolence. (Yoshimi)



Muro Kenji

Freelance writer. Born in 1946. As a university student, became involved in efforts to support deserters from the United States Army. Has lived in the United States since the late 1980s; became a citizen in 1998. Writes on a broad range of topics including travel, politics, literary criticism, and biography, as well as fashion, music, computers, and publishing.

CRITICISM



Kainuma Hiroshi

Born in 1984. Currently pursuing a doctorate in sociology at the University of Tokyo. Received the Mainichi Publishing Culture Award in the category of Culture and Society for this book.

Fukushima-ron **[On Fukushima]**

By Kainuma Hiroshi

Seidosha, 2011. 194 x 133 mm. 413 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-7917-6610-9.

Since March 11 and the nuclear crisis that followed, Fukushima has become notorious around the world. The author of this book was born in Fukushima in 1984 and is currently a graduate student in sociology at the University of Tokyo. The result of five years of research, the study traces the historical background to the decision to build nuclear stations in Fukushima and uses this to discuss how the regions became subordinate to the center in the context of Japan's postwar growth.

The book also makes clear the political background to the government's postwar decision to shake up its energy policy and promote the "peaceful use of nuclear energy." Increasingly left behind by the rapid economic growth of the period and facing precipitous decline, Fukushima fell for the promise that it could turn its for-

tunes around by agreeing to host nuclear power stations. The book examines the cultural and historical background of the region and provides a clear account of the process by which the powerful "nuclear village" came into being.

In the past, nuclear energy tended to be overlooked, despite the central role it played in the growth of postwar society. The author argues that this was due to the increasing authority of the central government, which usurped the autonomy of the regions.

This book traces the past developments that led to this unforeseen disaster. At the same time, its call for people to break away from myth is a powerful message for the future. (Yonahara)

CINEMA

Shōwa pinku eigakan **["Pink" Movies of the Shōwa Era]**

By Suzuki Yoshiaki

Shakai Hyōronsha, 2011. 187 x 128 mm. 340 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-7845-0964-5.

The erotic movies known as *pinku eiga* ("pink movies") in Japanese represent a unique genre that occupies an important position in the history of Japanese film. More than simple pornography, many of these movies are marked by a strong sense of narrative and realistically reflect the social conditions of their times. *Pinku eiga* were produced in large numbers between 1962 and 1988—a period that coincides with Japan's era of rapid economic growth.

The author, a leading authority with numerous previous studies on the subject under his belt, has been following the "pink" movie industry for almost thirty years, ever since falling under the spell of the genre as a high-school student. At the heart of his admiration is a deep respect and affection for the people responsible

for these bold cinematic experiments.

The films were made in poor conditions, with low budgets, short shooting schedules, and frequent crackdowns by the authorities. But these unpromising conditions inspired the filmmakers to innovate, producing a long succession of ambitious works that won passionate support from audiences. Many directors in Japan today got their start in the world of "pink" films, among them Takita Yōjirō, an Academy Award winner for best foreign language film. Through interviews with the industry's distinctive directors, production assistants, and actresses, this book traces the history of the films, introducing numerous previously unknown episodes and restoring a vanished age to vivid life. (Yonahara)



Suzuki Yoshiaki

Born in 1957. A reporter and film scholar, covering the entertainment industry, celebrities, and film history. Related works include Nikkatsu roman poruno ibun: Yamaguchi Seiichirō no kiseki [Nikkatsu Romantic Pornography, The Untold Story: The Path of Yamaguchi Seiichirō] and Wakamatsu Kōji: Sei to bōryoku no kakumei [Wakamatsu Kōji: Revolution in Sex and Violence].



Suzuki Yoshikazu

Born in 1952. Joined the Yomiuri Shimbun after graduating from Waseda University; member of the editorial board since 2007. Broadcast interviewer since 1985. Contributing author to works including Terebi bangumi no 40 nen [40 Years of TV Shows] and Minkan hōsō 50 nen shi [Fifty Years of Commercial Broadcasting].

Taiga drama no 50 nen [Fifty Years of NHK Historical Dramas]

By Suzuki Yoshikazu

Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011. 196 x 133 mm. 343 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-12-004236-2.

Every year since 1963, NHK (Japan Broadcasting Corporation) has aired a *taiga* drama. These sagas last close to a year and are typically set during some pivotal point in Japanese history. Although reams of commentary and description are published on the latest series and its cast each year, there have been surprisingly few studies of the genre as a whole. This book helps to fill the gap, exploring the way in which the NHK system, screenwriters, directors, and actors have interacted to shape the *taiga* drama over the past fifty years. There are some fascinating insights along the way. We discover that the origins of the genre lie not in the conventional samurai drama, as might be assumed, but in the unique documentary-like approach of director Yoshida Naoya, who had a decisive impact on the

genre in its early years. Over the years, NHK has produced a number of *taiga* dramas dealing with the end of the Tokugawa era and the Meiji Restoration. This was the period that ushered in Japan's modern era, and yet on almost every occasion, the result has been a drop in ratings that caused the network to run scurrying back to more conventional, crowd-pleasing samurai spectacles. Suzuki discusses the sense of community that develops among those involved in making these long-running series, many of which tend to use the same actors, directors, and producers. The *taiga* drama is more than simply a glorified samurai drama. Few genres of popular entertainment provide as much insight into the evolution of Japanese attitudes to history over the past fifty years. (Yoshimi)

SOCIETY

Sekkusu girai na wakamono tachi [Japan's Sex-Averse Young People]

By Kitamura Kunio

Media Factory, 2011. 172 x 107 mm. 192 pp. ¥740. ISBN 978-4-8401-3960-1.

Japan's growing population of "herbivorous males" (*sōshoku-kei danshi*) were one of the buzzwords of 2009 and are still the subject of frequent media attention today. Although there is no clear-cut definition of the term, it generally refers to passive, milquetoast males with little or no interest in the opposite sex.

Kitamura is an obstetrician and gynecologist who has taken part in research studies conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labor, and Welfare and also offers counseling on sexual issues. Based on the wealth of data collected in the field, he comes to the startling conclusion that not only young people but the Japanese as a whole have grown averse to sex.

The causes vary. Some people are so obsessed with anime that they have lost interest in real-life women, while others

abstain from sex because of a longing for platonic love. In other cases, a person may simply regard sex as too much hassle or be physically worn out after long hours at work.

Kitamura points to two social factors underlying this trend. One is that contemporary Japanese society places no moral or religious constraints on masturbation. The other is the impact of e-mail and other digital communication tools, which have led to fewer opportunities for men and women to relate face-to-face.

Although ostensibly concerned with a study of contemporary sexual mores, this intriguing book brings many of the issues in Japanese society into clear relief. (Chō)



Kitamura Kunio

Born in 1951. Obstetrician-gynecologist. Head of the Japan Family Planning Association Clinic since 1988. A specialist in the mind-body problems of teenagers. Works include Tinzū bodibukku [Teens' Body Book] and Senmon'i ga tsutaeru 40-dai kara no shiawase, sekkusu [A Medical Specialist's Guide to Happiness and Sex After Forty].



Maruhama Eriko

Born in 1951. Taught social studies at a public junior high school after majoring in Japanese history at Yokohama City University. Enrolled as graduate student at Meiji University in 2004. Awarded the Hiratsuka Raichō Encouragement Prize in 2006 for a study on the history of the nuclear disarmament petition campaign.

***Gensuikin shomei undō no tanjō* [Birth of the Nuclear Disarmament Petition Campaign]**

By Maruhama Eriko

Gaifūsha, 2011. 194 x 133 mm. 416 pp. ¥3,500. ISBN 978-4-7736-3505-8.

In March 1954, the crew of the Japanese fishing vessel *Daigo Fukuryū Maru* (Lucky Dragon 5) fell seriously ill after being exposed to radioactive fallout from a US hydrogen bomb test on Bikini Atoll in the Marshall Islands. The response in Japan was a petition campaign calling for nuclear disarmament that quickly gained nationwide momentum. The impetus for the campaign came from a band of housewives in the Sugunami area of Tokyo. Through extensive interviews with the women involved, Maruhama examines how the seeds of Japan's antinuclear movement were sown in Sugunami, a community with no experience of radioactive fallout and no direct connection with the *Daigo Fukuryū Maru*. Two pivotal factors emerge: the nonpartisan community organizations that took root in post-

war Sugunami and the work of the progressive scholar and activist Niijima Shigeru (the model for the father in Yamada Yōji's film *Kabē* [Our Mother]).

The intersection between this particular community and broader historical developments is a fascinating subject. In terms of organization, however, Maruhama might have done better to begin with the birth of the nuclear disarmament movement before treating the local historical background as part of a more detailed discussion of how the movement developed. As it is, one must wait until Chapter 8 for a discussion of the main focus of the book. Another disappointment is Maruhama's decision to cut up the interviews. The publication of these interviews in full would be a welcome contribution to this fascinating area of research. (Yoshimi)

MEDIA

***Senzen no rajio hōsō to Matsushita Kōnosuke* [Prewar Radio Broadcasts and Matsushita Kōnosuke]**

By Sakamoto Shin'ichi

PHP Kenkyūsho, 2011. 195 x 133 mm. 416 pp. ¥2,200. ISBN 978-4-569-79608-6.

Panasonic founder Matsushita Kōnosuke was one of the industrial giants of postwar Japan. Through the PHP Institute, the think tank he founded just after World War II, and the Matsushita Institute of Government and Management, established in 1979, Matsushita has exerted a lasting influence on economic, political, and religious thought in postwar Japan. In this book Sakamoto Shin'ichi searches for the influences that shaped Matsushita's widely admired management philosophy. After comparing Matsushita's ideas with various secular currents in modern Japanese thought, he concludes that the Matsushita creed actually had more in common with the doctrines of the neo-Buddhist sects that were making inroads into Japanese society around this time. This brings him to the surprising conclu-

sion that Matsushita's main inspiration was not what he read but early Japanese radio broadcasts. Sakamoto offers the intriguing theory that the religious sermons Matsushita heard on the radio laid the foundation for his business philosophy. Despite some intriguing similarities between Matsushita's writings and statements by neo-Buddhist religious leaders, one could wish for more compelling evidence—if not from recordings of such sermons (which have apparently been lost), then perhaps a demonstration of how the broadcasts might have fitted into Matsushita's daily schedule, or a closer examination of the influence these sermons had on their audiences. Sakamoto's hypothesis is an appealing one. It is to be hoped that further research will shed more light on the subject. (Yoshimi)



Sakamoto Shin'ichi

Born in 1971. Completed doctoral studies at Osaka City University Graduate School of Economics, earning a PhD in economics. Joined the PHP Institute. Currently a research fellow in the Department of Matsushita Philosophy, Research Division, specializing in the history of economic thought in Japan. Works include Shibusawa Eiichi no keisei saimin shisō [Shibusawa Eiichi's Thoughts on Governing and Helping People] and Rajio no sensō sekinin [Radio's Responsibility for the War].

BIOGRAPHY



Kamei Shunsuke

Born in 1932. Graduated from the University of Tokyo, where he later earned his PhD and taught American and comparative literature. Published works include *Hakkuruberi Fin no Amerika* [*Huckleberry Finn's America*] and *Amerika de ichiban utsukushii hito—Maririn Monrō no bunkashi* [*The Most Beautiful Person in America: A Cultural History of Marilyn Monroe*].

Eibungakusha Natsume Sōseki **[Natsume Sōseki as a Scholar of English Literature]** By Kamei Shunsuke

Shōhakusha, 2011. 194 x 134 mm. 246 pp. ¥2,800. ISBN 978-4-7754-0176-7.

Countless books have been published about Natsume Sōseki, and many scholars have written about the relationship between his work and English literature. Surprisingly, however, this is the first comprehensive study to focus on Sōseki as a scholar of English literature.

The book documents Sōseki's life from his days as an English literature student. It shows how he continued his studies during stints as an English teacher in Matsuyama and Kumamoto, taking a close look at the articles Sōseki published in periodicals during these years.

Kamei also shows how Sōseki deepened his firsthand understanding of the cultural background to English literature during his time as a student in London, despite the psychological crisis brought on by his experiences in this leading cen-

ter of modern civilization.

Perhaps the richest part of the book is the discussion of Sōseki's time as a lecturer at Tokyo Imperial University. Drawing on the reminiscences of his students and Sōseki's own *Bungaku ron* [Theory of Literature] and *Eibungaku keishiki ron* [Theory of Form in English Literature], this section brings Sōseki the scholar vividly to life.

Despite its specialist nature, the book is written in an accessible style. As well as plugging an important gap in Sōseki studies, the book offers fascinating insights into Sōseki the man. (Chō)

MANGA

Umibe no machi **[The Town by the Seaside]**

By Sasaki Maki

Ōta Shuppan, 2011. 210 x 150 mm. 415 pp. ¥2,850. ISBN 978-4-7783-2143-7.

Sasaki Maki is a manga artist, illustrator, and picture book author who made his debut in 1966. Often credited with bringing a revolutionary new style of expressive possibilities to manga, Sasaki has a devoted following to this day. Among his admirers is the author Murakami Haruki, who used an illustration by Sasaki for the cover of his debut novel *Kaze no uta o kike* [trans. *Hear the Wind Sing*] and numerous other works. Murakami has described his reaction to Sasaki's art as being "like the blast of a new and unique kind of wind, sending a new kind of blood coursing through the body."

This book compiles manga from the early period of Sasaki's career, including many that have become legendary among fans. The passing of time has not dimmed the freshness they had when they first ap-

peared. Sasaki uses a remarkable range of approaches. Some pieces consist solely of surreal pictures with no text. Others resemble old-fashioned European copperplate prints, while others incorporate collages. It is a world that has more in common with pop art than conventional manga.

Despite the pervasive air of quiet, the overall impression is perhaps surprisingly cheerful. This is an anarchic world, but one at peace with itself. Sasaki has said that his intention was to draw manga in which the panels would resound with one another like the words in a conversation. Sasaki's unique art exists apart from the requirements of narrative and the passage of time, offering the reader a kind of enjoyment that can be found nowhere else. (Yonahara)



© Maki Sasaki

Sasaki Maki

Born in 1946. Manga artist, illustrator, and creator of picture books. Manga works include *Sasaki Maki sakuhinshū* [*The Sasaki Maki Collection*] and *Pikurusu gai ibun* [*The Untold Story of Pickle Town*]. Numerous picture books include *Yappari ōkami* [*As Expected, A Wolf*] and *Musshu Munieru o goshōkai shimasu* [*Introducing Monsieur Meunière*].

No. 9: Mizukami Tsutomu

This installment introduces Mizukami Tsutomu, a writer who channeled his early experiences of poverty and deprivation into a series of richly atmospheric novels of crime and passion, many of which were made into successful films.

Stories of Poverty and Passion

Born in an isolated village in the remote area of Wakasa in Fukui Prefecture, Mizukami Tsutomu (1919–2004) was an author who struggled his way up from poverty. His father was a carpenter who worked for temples and shrines, but with little work available during the economic recession of the Taishō era (1912–26), raising five children was not easy. The author's earliest years were spent in a leaky hovel without electricity, drinking water, or bath. Unable to afford toilet paper, the family used straw instead.

This early experience of deprivation and the gloomy climate of Wakasa had a decisive influence on Mizukami's writing. His breakthrough novel *Kiri to kage* [Mist and Shadow] (1959) is set in a destitute Wakasa village that is closely modeled on the place where he grew up. The desolate rural setting of *Kiga kaikyō* [Straits of Hunger] (1963), high in the Tanba mountains of Kyoto Prefecture, is also reminiscent of the author's home village. This was a harsh, unforgiving life, where planting rice involved wading through deep, swamp-like paddies.

Prewar Japan was in many ways an impoverished society. Tenant farmers in rural villages were particularly poor. Mizukami focused on this poverty and placed it at the center of his work.

In the Mizukami family, children were sent out to work from an early age, to minimize the number of mouths to feed. As the second son, Tsutomu was sent to work at Zuishun-in, a Buddhist temple. Finding the rigorous life there unbearable, Mizukami fled and was taken in at another temple, Tōji-in.

The author's experiences in Buddhist temples inspired what is perhaps his masterpiece, the Naoki Prize-winning novel *Gan no tera* [trans. *Temple of the Wild Geese*] (1961), as well as *Gobanchō Yūgiri-rō* [A House in the Quarter] (1963), an exquisite tragedy of love between a young monk and a girl sold into the pleasure quarters in Kyoto.

Mizukami's deprived childhood had a strong impact on all his works. Poverty was primarily a personal rather than a social issue. The early experience of poverty had a decisive formative effect on Mizukami's oeuvre.

In 1936, at the age of 17, Mizukami left Tōji-in and returned to the secular world. He flitted through a variety of jobs, working as a medicine peddler and a bill collector for an automobile union. He also spent time in Manchuria (then under Japanese control), where he was in charge of local coolie laborers.

After returning to Japan, Mizukami drifted from one publisher to the next. The pay was always meager, and Mizukami remained poor. But it was around this time that he began to move in literary circles and aspired to become a novelist.

Mizukami married in 1943. Life remained hard in the postwar years. Tired of the poverty, his wife took a job in a dance hall catering to occupation troops, and the two divorced. Mizukami took responsibility for raising their daughter alone. These circumstances are depicted in detail in the 1967 autobiographical novel *Iteru niwa* [Frozen Garden], in which the "good-for-nothing" first-person protagonist is abandoned by his wife, who becomes a dancer and shows a growing lust for life.

One of the characteristics of postwar Japan was that women were often quicker to recover from the defeat than men. In this respect, Mizukami and his wife were typical.

Around this time Mizukami discovered Uno Kōji, a successful writer of naturalistic literary fiction whom Mizukami came to regard as his mentor. Mizukami always wrote with Uno in mind, and as a result his stories possess elements of "pure" literature, despite being essentially works of entertainment.

Mizukami continued to drift from one temporary job to another after his divorce. At one stage he worked as a door-to-door salesman, peddling clothes. In a lecture in later years, after he became a popular author, he looked back on this period with wry self-deprecation: "After the war, I used to walk the streets trying to pass off synthetic fabric as pure wool. I've always been an unscrupulous kind of merchant."

In fact, no issue was closer to home or more compelling for Mizukami than poverty. He learned the hard way that people on the lowest rungs of society cannot always afford to abide by the law if they want to survive.

In 1959, Mizukami published *Kiri to kage*. The novel was greeted with acclaim—it was also made into a movie—and earned him a Naoki Prize nomination. At long last, Mizukami had found his feet as a novelist.

Kiri to kage is a mystery on a grand scale, in which the murder of an elementary school teacher in a seaside village in Wakasa eventually leads to a major scandal involving the textile industry and a high-profile politician. The work was published shortly after the sensational success of Matsumoto Seichō's 1958 novel *Ten to sen* [trans. *Points and Lines*], when the "social awareness" mystery was emerging as a new genre of popular fiction.

More nuanced than conventional whodunits, social awareness mysteries interweave murder cases with issues of contemporary social concern. Mizukami decided to try his hand at this fledgling genre.

The result was the masterpiece *Kiga kaikyō*. The novel skillfully incorporates one of the worst marine accidents in Japanese history, the sinking of the *Tōyamaru* ferry connecting Hokkaidō and Honshū, into a thrilling account of crimes perpetrated by a man from a poverty-stricken rural background. The novel transcends the limitations of the mystery genre to evoke the sorrows of the Japanese

poor and was highly praised by the novelist Tanizaki Jun'ichirō.

Having spent much of his childhood in temples, Mizukami had a profound interest in Buddhism. Among his works are *Ikkyū* (1975) and *Ryōkan* (1984), two books about the lives of well-known Japanese monks.

Mizukami returned to a rural life toward the end of his

life, living out his final years in quiet solitude, making *washi* (Japanese paper) and working as a potter, making funerary urns in a small village in the mountains of Shinshū, Nagano Prefecture.

(Kawamoto Saburō,
literary and film critic)

An Introduction to the Films

***Gan no tera* [Temple of the Wild Geese] (1962)**

Directed by Kawashima Yūzō

When Mizukami was sent away to a Kyoto temple as a ten-year-old, the resident priest was enjoying a lifestyle that was far from the Zen ideal. *Gan no tera* is based on the novel that came out of this childhood experience.

A young monk (played by Takami Kuniichi) from a poor village is shocked when he discovers the truth about the lascivious life the temple priest (Mishima Masao) is leading with his young female companion (Wakao Ayako). Bitterly disillusioned with life at the temple, he eventually murders the priest, his mentor. The film provides a compelling depiction of the humiliations of the young monk's life, which include being forced to launder the woman's underwear.



Gan no tera © 1962 Kadowa Pictures, Inc. DVD available from Kadokawa Shoten. (¥4,725)



Gobanchō Yūgiri-rō DVD available from Toei Video Co., Ltd. (¥4,725)

***Gobanchō Yūgiri-rō* [A House in the Quarter] (1963)**

Directed by Tasaka Tomotaka

In 1950 the Temple of the Golden Pavilion in Kyoto, a national treasure, was burned down. The culprit was a young monk at the temple. *Gobanchō Yūgiri-rō* is a tragic love story inspired by these real-life events.

A young man from a poor rural background (Kawarasaki Chōichirō) enters the Kyoto temple as a novice monk. Having been ridiculed all his life for his stutter, he has become a misanthropic introvert and loner. On his first visit to the pleasure quarters, he meets a beautiful woman (Sakuma Yoshiko) who turns out to be from the same village. In time, the two fall in love. Sakuma's melancholy beauty shines out in the role of the tragic young woman sold into prostitution.

***Kiga kaikyō* [Straits of Hunger, or A Fugitive From the Past] (1964)**

Directed by Uchida Tomu

Kiga kaikyō is a tour de force by director Uchida Tomu, who depicted the story of an impoverished farming village in *Tsuchi* [Earth], a pre-World War II film released in 1939. Much more than just a crime movie, *Kiga kaikyō* is a probing examination of the unhappiness of human fate. The hero (Mikuni Rentarō) takes part in a robbery on a pawnshop in Hokkaido and murders his two accomplices. Amid the tumult of the immediate postwar years, he becomes a successful businessman. But when a prostitute who knows his past (Hidari Sachiko) appears, he kills again before she can spill his secret. Ban Junzaburō plays the detective on the criminal's heels. The grainy black-and-white texture of the expanded 16-millimeter film enhances the power of this tragic tale.



Kiga kaikyō DVD available from Toei Video Co., Ltd. (¥4,725)

Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes

The awards have been announced for the 146th Akutagawa and Naoki Prizes. The two Akutagawa Prize winners this time around were Enjoe Toh, for *Dōkeshi no chō* [Clown's Butterfly], published in the July issue of *Gunzō*, and Tanaka Shin'ya, for *Tomogui* [Cannibalism], published in the October issue of *Subaru*. The Naoki Prize went to Hamuro Rin for *Higurashi no ki* [Chronicle of the Cicadas], published by Shōdensha.

Enjoe Toh studied physics as a graduate student at the University of Tokyo and made his literary debut in 2006 as a science fiction writer. He has since published widely in a variety of genres. He cites Abe Kōbō as an influence. Featuring a polylinguistic writer as its protagonist, the prize-

winning novel is a work of experimental fiction that examines the nature of language and the meaning of writing.

The other winner, Tanaka, had been nominated for the prize four times previously since his debut in 2005. Incorporating some graphic depictions of sex and violence, his story traces the hereditary ties between a father and his son. Tanaka created a media stir with his response to his award. Suggesting it was "only natural" that he should win after being nominated so many times, he displayed a surly indifference to reporters' questions that has earned him a reputation as something of a rebel.

The Naoki Prize winner Hamuro, also a five-time nominee, did not make his literary debut until the age of 54, after working for many years as

a newspaper journalist. Just seven years later, he has taken Japan's top prize for popular literature, winning with a historical novel set in a fictional Japanese feudal domain. The work centers on a samurai magistrate tasked with compiling a history of the domain, who is then commanded to take his own life in atonement for a scandal that occurred several years earlier. The author explores the theme of how to live when your time on earth is limited, interweaving the tale with descriptions of the hardships endured by ordinary farmers and the secrets of the domain.

Bestselling Books in 2011

Japan's major book distributors have released their bestseller lists for 2011. According to the ranking issued by

Other Titles of Interest

Due to space limitations only 16 books can be introduced in the "New Titles" section. The following are additional works selected by the Advisory Board as worth sharing with Japanese Book News readers.

- *Korekushon sensō to bungaku 19: Hiroshima/Nagasaki* [War Literature Collection Vol. 19: Hiroshima/Nagasaki]. Shūeisha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-08-157019-5. A collection of outstanding literary works dealing with issues from the horror of the 1945 nuclear attacks to today's world of hydrogen bombs and nuclear power.
- *Genjitsu* [Phantom Sun]. By Ichikawa Shin'ichi, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-216998-1. A historical novel centered on an imaginative depiction of the Shimabara Rebellion, the biggest peasant revolt in Japanese history.
- *Shirotānofu no kikyō* [Shirotanoff's Homecoming]. By Ikeuchi Osamu, Seidosha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-7917-6598-0. Elegant short stories by a German literature scholar and renowned essayist.
- *Yorozu no koto ni ki o tsuke yo* [Be Careful About Everything]. By Kawase Nanao, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-217143-4. A murder mystery featuring an anthropologist sleuth and a deadly curse. Winner of the prestigious Edogawa Rampo Award.
- *Kōbai* [Red-Blossomed Apricot]. By Tsumura Setsuko, Bungei Shunjū, 2011. ISBN 978-4-16-380680-8. This calm but powerful novel depicts the brave struggle against cancer of the author's husband, Yoshimura Akira, from the time of his operation to the end of his life.
- *Boku wa, soshite bokutachi wa dō ikiru ka* [How Should I and How Should We Live?]. By Nashiki Kaho, Rironsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-652-07979-9. A coming-of-age novel centered on a young protagonist's daily emotions and thoughts.
- *Goran no supō* [Braw to Yoobai]. By Machida Kō, Shinchōsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-10-421502-7. The first collection of the author's stories in six years; bringing together works written over the past 11 years.
- *Haru o urandari wa shinai* [I Don't Reproach the Spring]. By Ikezawa Natsuki, Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-12-004261-1. A collection of reflections on visits to Tōhoku after last year's disaster. An attempt to provide an overall picture of the disaster, including its impact on the environment, politics, and the energy industry.
- *Shimokitazawa shukusaikō* [Shimokitazawa: A Celebration]. By Ōki Yutaka, Genki Shobō, 2011. ISBN 978-4-901998-72-7. The author, who has run a jazz bar in the Shimokitazawa district of Tokyo for the past 36 years, evokes the vibrant nightlife of the area and describes the many famous people he has known, including the legendary actor Matsuda Yūsaku.
- *Nihon boro yado kikō* [A Journey Through Japan's Tattered Inns]. By Kamiakito Akira, Tetsujinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-904676-18-9. An account of the charms of the rundown lodgings visited by the author around Japan.
- *Midori san to karakuri yashiki* [Midori and the House of Secrets]. By Suzuki Haruka, Shūeisha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-08-781477-4. Intrigued by a strange house with a telegraph pole sticking out from its roof, the young author tries to find out more about Midori, the spritely 97-year-old who lives there.
- *Tokiwa-sō saigo no jūnin no kiroku* [Record of the Last Resident of Tokiwa-sō]. By Yamauchi Jōji, Tōkyō Shōseki, 2011. ISBN 978-4-487-80563-1. Tokiwa-sō was an apartment where many young manga artists lived before they became famous. One of their assistants shares some of his favorite anecdotes.
- *Ōmu Shinrikyō no seishin shi* [Aum Shinrikyō: A Spiritual History]. By Ōta Toshihiro, Shunjūsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-393-32331-1. An account of the Aum Shinrikyō cult as a modern religion, addressing the cult from a history-of-thought perspective that has been missing from previous studies.
- *Okinawa (fukki) no kōzō* [The Structure of (the Return of) Okinawa]. By Takahashi Junko, Shinjuku Shobō, 2011. ISBN 978-4-88008-418-3. Examines the reintegration of Okinawa into the state framework following its return to Japan in 1972.
- *Naze boku wa dokyumentarī o toru no ka* [Why Do I Make Documentaries?]. By Sōda Kazuhiro, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-288113-5. Film theory from one of the most acclaimed

Tōhan Co., Ltd., the top-selling book was Higashigawa Tokuya's *Nazotoki wa dinā no ato de* [Solving Mysteries Is for After Dinner], a collection of mystery stories featuring a sharp-tongued butler and the rich young woman detective who is his employer. The book, which has been made into a television drama, has sold some 1.8 million copies. The author's popularity soared higher than ever in 2011, following the publication of a sequel in November.

Placing second on the Tōhan list in 2011 was another survivor from the previous year, *Taishibō kei Tanita no shain shokudō* [The Employee Cafeteria at Health-O-Meter Manufacturer Tanita], a cookbook based on the cafeteria meals served to employees at Tanita, a manufacturer of health scales that measure body fat. A follow-up

volume was also a hit, placing third on the list.

In addition to physical health, Japanese readers are also showing an increasing appetite for books about positive mental habits. Books of spiritual advice by soccer players have been particularly popular. *Kokoro o totonoeru* [Get Your Mind in Order], a book of tips on how to remain calm by Hasebe Makoto, the captain of Japan's national soccer team, has sold over a million copies, placing fourth on the Tōhan list. His teammate Nagatomo Yūto placed nineteenth with *Nihon danji* [A Japanese Man], which has sold 400,000 copies. Books by members of Japan's World Cup-winning women's team also sold well, including a book by captain Sawa Homare and another by coach Sasaki Norio.

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documentary makers working today, focusing on work for his latest film, *Peace*.

- *Tokyo disuko 80s & 90s* [Tokyo Discos in the 1980s and 1990s]. By Iwasaki Tomoaki, K&B Publishers, 2011. ISBN 978-4-902800-18-0. A collection of interviews examining disco culture during Japan's economic bubble.
- *Hibiya kōen* [Hibiya Park]. By Shinji Isoya, Kajima Shuppankai, 2011. ISBN 978-4-306-07291-6. This history of Japan's first Western-style park, which opened more than a century ago, shows how the culture of everyday life in Tokyo has changed over that time.
- *Shiseidō to iu bunka sōchi* [Shiseidō as a Driver of Culture]. By Wada Hirofumi, Iwanami Shoten, 2011. ISBN 978-4-00-023488-7. A richly illustrated study drawing on a wealth of materials to study the wide-ranging influence of the Shiseidō company on cosmetics, fashion, cuisine, and art, tracing the development of women's culture in contemporary Japan.
- *Nihon no kōhō/PR 100 nen* [A Century of Publicity and Public Relations in Japan]. By Ikari Seiya, Dōyūkan, 2011. ISBN 978-4-496-04773-2. A study of publicity and public relations in Japan.
- *Tsunami to genpatsu* [The Tsunami and Nuclear Power]. By Sano Shin'ichi, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-217038-3. A leading nonfiction writer's account of the situation in the disaster areas following the March 11 tsunami and nuclear crisis, based on interviews with ordinary people.
- *"Borantia" no tanjō to shūen* [The Birth and Demise of the Volunteer Spirit]. By Nihei Norihiro, Nagoya Daigaku Shuppankai, 2011. ISBN 978-4-8158-0663-7. Traces volunteer discourse and reevaluates the current state of participatory civil society in Japan.
- *Rōkaru media to toshi bunka* [Local Media and Urban Culture]. By Okamura Keiko, Minerva Shobō, 2011. ISBN 978-4-623-05921-8. Considers the significance and role of local newspapers in small communities.
- *Chōsa hōdō ga jārizarumu o kaeru* [Changing Journalism Through Investigative Reporting]. Edited by Tajima Yasuhiko, Yamamoto Hiroshi, and Hara Toshio, Kadensha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-7634-0603-3. A collection of passionate essays on the potential impact of independent investigative journalism.
- *Abe Kōbō den* [Abe Kōbō: A Biography]. By Abe Neri,

Shinchōsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-10-329351-4. A respectful, affectionate biography of the life and works of the novelist Abe Kōbō by his daughter.

- *Kitazawa Tsunehiko to wa nanimono datta no ka?* [Who Was Kitazawa Tsunehiko?]. Edited by the Sure Editorial Group, 2011. Traces the life of Kitazawa Tsunehiko, the creator of the Sure Editorial Group, through the eyes of those who knew him.
- *Shōwa tennō* [Emperor Hirohito]. By Furukawa Takahisa, Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-12-102105. The first in-depth study to focus on the emperor's education in an attempt to understand his political and ideological beliefs.
- *Shōwa tennō to Washinton o musunda otoko* [The Man Who Linked Emperor Hirohito to Washington]. By Aoki Fukiko, Shinchōsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-10-373206-8. A nonfiction work based on the occupation diaries of American journalist Compton Pakenham. Reveals previously overlooked aspects of Japan's postwar history.
- *Meiji ishin to Yokohama kyōryūchi* [The Meiji Restoration and the Foreign Settlement in Yokohama]. By Ishizuka Hiromichi, Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2011. ISBN 978-4-642-08051-4. This book focuses on the foreign settlement in Yokohama, where troops from Britain, France, and other countries were stationed during the second half of the nineteenth century, to explore the Meiji Restoration from a variety of perspectives.
- *Kindai Nihon no shōgaku kyōkasho* [Elementary School Textbooks in Modern Japan]. By Kinoshita Ryūji, Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-12-004255. A history of textbooks used in the Meiji, Taishō, and early Shōwa eras, including numerous examples of textbook illustrations.
- *Senkyōshi Nikorai to sono jidai* [The Missionary Nikolai and His Times]. By Nakamura Ken'nosuke, Kōdansha, 2011. ISBN 978-4-06-288102-9. A study of the life and times of Russian missionary Nikolai, who came to Japan to proselytize Christianity during the Meiji era.
- *Amerika no kage no moto de* [Japan and the Philippines in America's Shadow]. Written and edited by Fujiwara Kiichi and Nagano Yoshiko, Hōsei Daigaku Shuppankyoku, 2011. ISBN 978-4-588-60318-1. A comparison between Japan and the Philippines, looking at the impact of American rule on the two countries' politics, society, culture, and history.

Bestselling Author Kakuta Mitsuyo Speaks at the JBN Salon

Kakuta Mitsuyo, one Japan's most popular and prolific women writers, was the special guest at the inaugural meeting of the Japanese Book News Salon held at the Hongō campus of the University of Tokyo in late September 2011. Kakuta discussed her recent novel *Tsurī hausu* [Tree House] (introduced in *JBN* No. 68) with Professor Numano Mitsuyoshi. The event was well attended by an audience of students, scholars, and translators.

The novel follows three generations of the Fujishiro family, who run a Chinese restaurant in the lively Shinjuku district of central Tokyo. It represents a new departure for Kakuta, whose previous work has dealt mainly with the everyday lives of dysfunctional families and the efforts of out-of-place people to form pseudo-families.

Tsurī hausu begins with the death of the grandfather Taizō and the discovery of his body by his grandson Yoshitsugu. Yoshitsugu begins to wonder why he knows so little about his grandparents' past and why his own family has always seemed so rootless. The answers lie in Manchuria, where his grandparents spent their youth. Like many young Japanese during the Great Depression, Taizō and Yae, who would later become his wife and Yoshitsugu's grandmother, drifted to the Chinese continent in search of a better life, virtually cutting themselves off from their families in Japan.

Hoping to jog his grandmother's memory, Yoshitsugu takes her on a journey to Changchun, where she lived as a young woman. The subsequent narrative slips back and forth between the early 1940s, where Taizō and Yae find refuge from the war with a Chinese family who run a small restaurant, and the present, as Yoshitsugu and his uncle Taijirō help Yae to track down the Chinese family and thank them for their kindness. Her gratitude is tinged with regret for her first child, who died on the arduous journey back to Japan. She cannot help reflecting that the child might have lived had she left him with the Chinese family, who had begged her to let them adopt the boy.

For Kakuta, who was born in 1967, tackling the still controversial subject of Manchuria entailed certain risks. Despite extensive research, including a short trip to China, she anticipated criticism from the generation now in their seventies and eighties who experienced Manchuria at firsthand. Wanting to encourage younger writers to move beyond the realm of the everyday and deal with the larger issues of history, she decided to take the risk. "About six or seven years ago I noticed that young European novelists were starting to produce really fascinating fiction about the war. But that wasn't happening in Japan," she said.

She also wanted to connect the experiences of Yae and Taizō's generation to the present. In recent years, young people are once again facing economic hardship and unemployment. If these struggling young people heard of a place with a booming economy that seemed to promise good jobs and a happy, carefree life, many would no doubt jump at the chance to go.

Although escape is a common theme throughout *Tsurī*



hausu, it means different things to the older and younger generations. After leaving Japan for Manchuria, Yae and Taizō later flee from the war. For them, running away is a means of resisting the dark current of the times. For their children, however, escape is more passive, sometimes leading to dangerous destinations. During the late 1960s, one son is drawn into the student movement and, after briefly considering leaving for North Korea with a male lover, commits suicide. Taijirō later joins a religious cult that remains unnamed but is clearly modeled on Aum Shinrikyō, the cult that released sarin gas in the Tokyo subway system in 1995. Whereas Yae and Taizō escaped in order to survive, their children drift aimlessly, sometimes seeming to run away from life itself.

A more positive aspect of the Manchurian legacy is the openness of the Fujishiro household. As Yae and Taizō open their doors to anyone claiming a Manchurian connection, their children grow up surrounded by a constantly shifting cast of drifters and acquaintances. Professor Numano suggested that Yae and Taizō might have been trying to recreate the sort of life they experienced with the Chinese family in Manchuria, where refugees were welcome. "I think Japanese families used to be more open, too, with people coming and going as they pleased," Kakuta said. The Fujishiro home offers an alternative to the sometimes claustrophobic nuclear family that is now the norm in Japan.

Kakuta's previous works include *Taigan no kanojo* [trans. *Woman on the Other Shore*], which depicts the unlikely friendship between Sayoko, an insecure housewife, and Aoi, the seemingly unflappable career woman she works for. The parallel story of Aoi's high-school friendship that ended in attempted suicide adds depth to the story.

In *Yōkame no semi* [trans. *The Eighth Day*] (see *JBN* No. 55), Kakuta explores motherhood from an unusual angle. After an abortion leaves her infertile, Kiwako kidnaps her married lover's child and raises her on the run until she is arrested four years later. In the moving conclusion, the kidnapped girl, now a college student pregnant with her married lover's child, discovers how significant her painful childhood experience really was.

Kakuta's novels have no real "heroes," but her talent for dealing with complex issues through the lives of ordinary people gives her work universal appeal.

(Margaret Mitsutani, professor of English literature at Kyoritsu Women's University and translator of *Yōkame no semi*.)