



HAL
open science

Dystopia as a narrative keyword: Tawada Yōko's responses to Japanese 3/11

Veronica de Pieri

► **To cite this version:**

Veronica de Pieri. Dystopia as a narrative keyword: Tawada Yōko's responses to Japanese 3/11. Loxias, 2016, Doctoriales XIII, 54. hal-04519785

HAL Id: hal-04519785

<https://hal.science/hal-04519785v1>

Submitted on 25 Jun 2024

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.



Distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution - NonCommercial 4.0 International License



AVERTISSEMENT

Les publications du site Epi-revel sont protégées par les dispositions générales du Code de la propriété intellectuelle.

Conditions d'utilisation - respect du droit d'auteur et de la propriété intellectuelle

L'accès aux références bibliographiques et au texte intégral, aux outils de recherche ou au feuilletage de l'ensemble des revues est libre, cependant article, recension et autre contribution sont couvertes par le droit d'auteur et sont la propriété de leurs auteurs.

Les utilisateurs doivent toujours associer à toute unité documentaire les éléments bibliographiques permettant de l'identifier correctement et notamment toujours faire mention du nom de l'auteur, du titre de l'article, de la revue et du site Epi-revel. Ces mentions apparaissent sur la page de garde des documents sauvegardés sur les postes des utilisateurs ou imprimés par leur soin. L'Université Côte d'Azur est l'éditeur du portail Epi-revel et à ce titre détient la propriété intellectuelle et les droits d'exploitation du site.

L'exploitation du site à des fins commerciales ou publicitaires est interdite ainsi que toute diffusion massive du contenu ou modification des données sans l'accord des auteurs et de l'équipe Epi-Revel.



Dystopia as a narrative keyword: Tawada Yōko's responses to Japanese 3/11

Veronica De Pieri

Résumé

Le 11 mars 2011 à 14h46 l'écrivaine japonaise Tawada Yōko se trouvait à Berlin, à des kilomètres de son pays d'origine. Pourtant, l'auteure a subi les effets du tremblement de terre de magnitude 9 qui a frappé la côte du Tōhoku à ce moment-là. Quand le tsunami a touché la côte, balayant tout ce qui avait été épargné par le tremblement de terre, les répliques sismiques ont frappé Tawada et se répercutent aujourd'hui dans ses dernières œuvres. D'abord, *Fushi no Shima* (« L'île de la Vie éternelle ») publié dans la collection « *Sore demo sangatsu wa, mata* » : un récit de dix pages sur une île morte, c'est-à-dire le Japon. Ensuite, après des années de silence sur le thème du *Daishinsai*, la collection de récits publiés en 2014 par le titre évocateur *Kentōshi* (« Le Messager de la Lanterne votive ») résonne encore l'écho du lendemain : Tawada imagine un scénario catastrophe dans un avenir proche clairement influencé par le désastre du 2011. La clé dystopique adoptée par l'auteur pour ces narrations après Fukushima représente l'œil de la caméra par laquelle l'écrivain observe le 11 mars japonais. Cet article a pour objectif d'analyser ces réponses du Tawada Yōko au 3/11 japonais à l'aide du journal écrit par l'auteur durant ces journées et publié sous le titre français *Journal des jours tremblants : Après Fukushima*.

Mots-clés

Tawada Yōko, Fukushima

Abstract en anglais On 11th March 2011 at 2:46 PM the Japanese writer Tawada Yōko was in Berlin, miles away from her Japanese homeland. Still, the author got affected by the 9 magnitude earthquake that stroke Tōhoku coast at that time. As the tsunami came to shore wiping out everything that was spared by the quake, the aftershocks reached Tawada and now reverberates in some of her last new literary works. First, *Fushi no Shima* ("The Island of the Eternal Life") published in the collection *Sore demo sangatsu wa, mata* : a ten-page story about a no more lively island, namely, Japan. Then, after years of muteness regarding the *Daishinsai* topic, the 2014 collection of novels published under the evocative title *Kentōshi* ("The messenger of the votive lantern") resonates the echo of that aftermath again : Tawada imagines a forthcoming catastrophic scenario clearly influenced by 2011 disaster. The dystopian keyword adopted by the author for these post-Fukushima narratives represents a camera lens through which the writer observes Japanese 11th March. This brief article aims to investigate these two Tawada Yōko's responses to Japanese 3/11 with the aid of the journal

the author wrote during those days and published under the French title
Journal des jours tremblants : Après Fukushima.

Tawada Yōko, Fukushima, dystopia, trauma

Japon

Période contemporaine

Introduction

Dystopian fiction seems to have recently gained a strategic place in the worldwide narrative production. *The Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins as well as the *Divergent* trilogy by Veronica Roth, just to name a few, were protagonists of such a huge success as to make it necessary a transposition into movies for the big screen. A common denominator for the fame of these literary products is the dystopian perspective through which their authors portray our world in the near future.

As an antonym for “utopia” firstly adopted by Thomas More in his 1516 homonymous novel¹, “cacotopia” or “dystopia” are terms generally referred to an unpleasant futuristic world dominated by a cataclysmic decline of social frameworks : totalitarian governments play the role of guarantors of this illusory perfect society by forcing conformity among people resulting in the main cause for dehumanisation, while environmental disasters occur as a discouraging backdrop. All these factors contribute to the collapse of social structures in an endless spiral of destruction. In the most extreme cases, when the dystopian elements meet the genre known as “science fiction”, the common tropes turn to be so devastating such an extent that nuclear warfare, alien invasion and Zombie apocalypse made their appearance on stage too.

Although the undeniable success of the recent dystopian publications, the world portrayed in the novels through the centuries by authors as famous as Jules Verne, Samuel Butler, Jack London, Vladimir Nabokov, Roald Dahl and Don DeLillo are clearly connected by the same red string : the desire to draw attention to real world issues regarding, above all, society, politics, environment and technology. Hence dystopia represents the keyword to explore social and political organisations through an imaginative and speculative fictionalised narrative focused on future human behaviour.

As regarding post-Fukushima narratives, the dystopian approach was adopted by many authors concerned about the consequences of the nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant : Kawakami Hiromi (*Kamisama 2011*, 2011), Gen'yū Sōkyū (*Hikari no yama*, 2013), Tsushima Yūko (*Yamaneko Doomu*,

¹ Since the original text was written in Latin, the 1556 English translation by Raphe Robynson is preferred. See Thomas More, *More's Utopia: The English Translation Thereof Made by Raphe Robynson*, Whitefish, ed. Kessinger Publishing LCC, 2007.

2013), Henmi Yō (*Aoi Hana*, 2013)² are just a few of the novelists who imagined the aftermath of a nuclear contamination on Japanese soil in a long term period. Among them, Tawada Yōko stands out for a spokesperson of anti-nuclear activists who organised movements throughout the nation soon after 11th March 2011.

The author (多和田葉子, Tōkyō, March 23, 1960-) is a contemporary Japanese-German prose writer awarded, among others, with the Akutagawa and Tanizaki prizes³. Her popularity trespassed national borders : she has been living in Hamburg, then in Berlin since 1982 ; eventually, her first approach to literature, the 1987 collection of poems, was a bilingual work. Always interested in translation problems and in the difficulty of transposing the countless nuances of languages from Japanese into German and vice versa, Tawada is a prolific author able to speak and write fluently both languages. Actually her rich portfolio counts a collection of different literary-genre experimentations, from poems and prose to playwrights and radio plays. Her participation in symposiums and events concerning contemporary literature is always a highly sought-after performance. Alone on the stage, the author is able to catch people's attention by performing her selected literary works. Changes of tone, voice modulation, captivating text : these are the secrets for Tawada's literary performances that leave the public speechless.

The social commitment of the author is remarkable too, especially after the three-fold catastrophe of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown that shocked Japan on 11th March 2011. Even though miles away from her homeland, Tawada felt immediately involved in the emergency situation of Tōhoku area and urged to make her voice heard too. In her official site she promoted the German “~100 gute Gründe gegen Atomkraft~” project⁴, an initiative to spread the 100 good reasons against the usage of nuclear energy. With its eight active nuclear power stations, Germany assisted to a revival of the 70s anti-nuclear protests as soon as June 2011 and decided to adopt a phase-out policy which consists in a discontinuing usage of nuclear energy to avoid accident like the one occurred at Fukushima Daiichi.

As a German citizen, Tawada felt particularly touched by the risk of a nuclear accident to happen in Germany too⁵ : no wonder that her passionate anti-nuclear contribution engaged her persona as well as her literary production. This brief article aims to investigate two authorial responses to Japanese 11th March : *Fushi no shima* (“The Island of the Eternal Life”) and *Kentōshi* (“The messenger of the votive lantern”). The first short story was published in the *Sore demo sangatsu wa, mata*

² Further information can be found in Saeko Kimura, *Shinsai bungaku ron. Atarashii nihon bungaku no tameni*. Tōkyō, ed. Seidosha, 2013.

³ Prizes won for *Inu mukoiri* 『犬婿入り』 (“The Bridegroom Was a Dog”, 1993) and *Yogisha no yakōressha* 『容疑者の夜行列車』 (“The Suspect Person of the Nocturne Train”, 2002) respectively. All translations into English are to be considered as mine, unless otherwise specified.

⁴ Link to the official site: <https://www.100-gute-gruende.de/index.xhtml>. It provides also a PDF version of the “100 good reasons against nuclear energy” in French, Russian, Japanese and Chinese. Link to Tawada's official site page devoted to the project: http://yokotawada.de/?page_id=2

⁵ It was the author herself to open her heart at the “Incroci di civiltà” meeting organized by Ca' Foscari University (Venice), 12 April 2013.

collection of novels devoted to the 3/11 topic ; this volume has also seen his English translation under the title *March was made of Yarn*⁶. Then, after three years from that tragic day, the same novel was included in the collection called *Kentōshi*, a title borrowed from the long novel that opens the book⁷. Both these fictionalised works, although with an outstanding difference in length, take place in the forthcoming Japan whose dystopian scenario does not leave much to be imagined : traces of Fukushima nuclear accident can be perceived everywhere : Japan politics, economics, environmental and public health policies, every single aspect of everyday life is overshadowed by the consequences of 11th March disaster.

Fushi no shima

This ten-page novel is a first-person account by an unnamed character who encounters difficulties with his New York flight back to Germany⁸. It does not take so long to figure out that this protagonist is a voice from the future, namely, a 2017 traveller. The reasons under his discrimination at the airport are easy to say : the Japanese passport raises doubts about a possible radioactivity contamination of the passenger and his belongings. Tawada makes no secret about her concern for the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant fallout : the author points out the accident through a number of direct and indirect references that appear here and there throughout the novel : among others, “hōshanō busshitsu” 放射能物質 (radioactivity substance), “Daishinsai” 大震災 (Great Earthquake)⁹ for the former, “are irai” あれ以来, “sore iri” それ以来 (from that moment) for the latter. The voice-over eventually clarifies that

The year the accident occurred at Fukushima every nuclear power plants had to be shut down¹⁰.

betraying authorial strong stance for a nuclear freeze action to be quickly accomplished by Japanese government.

Then, the story moves forward. A combination of narrator’s flash backs contribute to spin the web of the events in which the reader gets irremediably tingled : in 2015 no inbound flights enable tourists to reach Japan but it has been possible at least until spring 2013 – narrator says – when mass media ensured the security of the country and the protagonist flew without problems to Kyōto¹¹. These tireless time slips are emphasised by the fact that, by the time this article was written

⁶ *Sore demo sangatsu wa, mata.* Tōkyō, ed. Kōdansha, 2012 and *March Was Made of Yarn: Reflections on the Japanese Earthquake, Tsunami, and Nuclear Meltdown.* New York, ed. Vintage Books.

⁷ Yōko Tawada, *Kentōshi*, Tōkyō, ed. Kōdansha, 2014.

⁸ Yōko Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, [2011], ed. Kōdansha, 2012, pp. 11-21.

⁹ Known as “Earthquake off the Pacific Tōhoku coasts” the 11th March earthquake is often referred to as *Higashi Nihon Daishinsai* 東日本大震災 or simply *Daishinsai* 大震災.

¹⁰ 「福島で事故があった年に全ての原子力発電所のスイッチを切るべきだったのだ。」, Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹¹ Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

any event described, although fictionalised, was already part of the past : the estrangement feeling perceived in trying to replace these episodes in a fictitious timeline goes hand in hand with the overwhelming perception that maybe, 11th March catastrophe also changed time's perspective.

The Kyōto's stay of the protagonist also offers Tawada the possibility to go further in her critics to governmental attitude towards the nuclear radiation contingency plan. The protagonist joined other guests in the hotel's hall to listen to an official speech by His Majesty the Emperor – to read by a hint of sarcasm ; however, an imperial executive appeared to talk on behalf of the imperial family :

Shut down all the nuclear power plants at once. These are the words of his Majesty¹².

It makes one wonder why the Emperor did not speak for himself, but Tawada comes to the aid by explaining the reason shortly after thorough narrator's words: it seems that his Majesty escaped Tōkyō together with the imperial family soon after 11th March 2011 due to the fear of radioactivity contamination: the ancient capital of Kyōto was re-established that year and no one has ever seen his Majesty again since that time. The implications of this statement are remarkable : even though Tawada's choice to not compromise straightly Emperor's persona with such a resolute public discourse can be seen as a form of reverential respect, his escape and the ongoing silence from the imperial family can be perceived as a critics for the loss of courage in handling post-3/11 situation. Moreover, a critical note can be addressed to the lack of responsibility by the people in charge : the imperial officer represents only the spokesperson for the sovereign and has no authority ; the Emperor, however, refused to make his appearance on the screen.

To complete the puzzle only a representative of the government is missed, but Tawada makes it up in the next few lines by talking about the Prime Minister's accident ; as to say, as soon as Japanese government had to face the increasing number of “hankaku undō” 反核運動 (anti-nuclear movements), protagonists, in Japan, of some sort of social revolution, the Prime Minister disappeared :

Even though a news about an “assassination” should have been normally broadcasted, mass media used “kidnapping” word instead, who knows why¹³.

This is maybe the main cause for the escalation of the political faction called “zeddo guruupu” Zグループ (Z-group) responsible for the privatisation of Japanese industries in 2015, along with the gradual but uncontrollable diffusion of its

¹²

「すべての電子力発電所のスイッチを直ちに切りなさい。これが陛下のお言葉です。」, Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹³

「普通なら「暗殺」のニュースが流れるはずなのに、マスコミはなぜか「拉致」という言葉を使った。」 Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

hegemony in every field of Japanese everyday life: a short time later even internet connection became unusable due to the stringent controls performed by the group in power.

The ingredients for a perfect dystopian novel are served: a totalitarian governmental structure prevents any contacts with the outside – namely, no internet connection, no incoming flights; by coordinating a close supervision on mass media the Z-group also carries out a censorship-alike strategy to control Japanese people.

Tawada does not miss also the chance to give voice to the fear of new earthquakes and tsunamis to happen again in the country by foreseeing the Ocean Pacific Earthquake to occur in 2017: the incapacity – or incompetence – to predict the occurrence of such disastrous events sows seeds of doubts about the reliability of the forecast and does not lack to throw Japanese people into panic.

And what about the protagonist, left alone at Berlin airport? He managed to reach German capital city, although without his luggage. He makes the reader part of the rumours he heard about a Chinese organisation – probably with roots in mafia groups – in New York Chinatown, who can provide tourists with a flight ticket to Japan for a monetary reward – cash only, obviously; but the company vanished without leaving a trace. Too late for the protagonist who could not even hope for the flight service to Okinawa, still a mirage.

By the way, at least he is repatriated to Germany and can keep the reader updated with other news directly from 2017. The fear of new environmental disasters results in the abandonment of the areas at most risk, such as Tōkyō suburbs, to give life to the heavily urbanisation of other Japanese districts like Hyōgo and Okinawa; the consequences are not hard to imagine: increasing number of looting, decreasing production and poverty in the abandoned regions¹⁴.

Even massive changes in social structure are noteworthy:

2011, exactly when people were exposed to radiation in Fukushima: they are over their 100s and everybody is still in good health; luckily no one has died yet¹⁵.

The connection between the title of the novel and its content is then revealed: *Fushi no shima* impersonates the island of the eternal life for real. This detail eventually underlines a lack of coherence in Tawada's narrative: the exposition to radioactivity has always thought to be the main cause for a swift death; in the best-case scenario – if it might be considered as a better one – the occurrence of cancer related disease leads to a slow and painful death. But this is not the case of post-3/11

¹⁴ Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, pp. 10-20.

¹⁵

「二〇一二年、福島で被曝した当時、百歳を超えていた人たちはみな今も健在で幸いにしてこれまで一人も亡くなっていない。」 Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

Japan where people seem to have benefited from Fukushima Daiichi nuclear accident. This is a clear example of the “unnatural narratology” described by Richardson and Alber¹⁶, just to name a few critics concerned about the representation of reality in fiction : Tawada presents a number of anti-mimetic events, as to say, events that do not answer to our world’s rules neither to the ones of a fictionalised parallel world, as the term “anti-mimetic” is defined by its characteristic to be opposite of “mimesis”, the art to imitate reality. The result is, again, a disorientating and defamiliarising feeling perceived in the reading.

However, is it sure that such a long-living life is desirable ? Tawada turns the table again : the protagonist hurries to add that on the contrary, children are weak and require daily care : the negative impact of radiation exposure manifests itself in the vulnerability of future generations. But every cloud has a silver lining : if the emerging storytellers suggest a return to the past, on the other hand the protagonist’s narration concludes by sharing with readers the good news that – at least – war related video games became old-fashioned : children prefer to challenge themselves with stories about dead souls who come back to life to say inexplicable words. The aim of such games seems to be slaughtering all the souls, but they show up one after another tirelessly :

Nevertheless, a person who continued playing without losing consciousness won the game but almost all the people who remember the meaning of the world “win” have already died¹⁷.

These are the last words of the novel, Tawada’s testament beyond hope. Victory belongs to those who believe, to those who fight until the very end : Japan has surrendered, the Land of the Rising Sun gave up to the choice of adopting nuclear energy for civic purposes, ignoring – or forgetting – the nuclear-linked past of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. Those dead souls who animate children’s video games can be interpreted as a metaphor for Tōhoku victims who desperately try to sensitize people about nuclear disasters. The decision to put on stage a dystopian story points out the repercussion of the nuclear accident at Fukushima Daiichi in the long period : as the testimonies by atomic bombing survivors often underline, a radioactivity exposure is not only a matter of the living society but it involves future generations too.

A final remark should be addressed to the figure of the voice-over : a plenty of reference about author’s life are recognisable throughout the story : the Japanese citizenship, Berlin as the city for residence, travels, rumours spread among Tawada’s acquaintances and then reported in the novel. And what if the protagonist

¹⁶ J. Alber, S. Iversen, H. S. Nielsen and B. Richardson, *Unnatural Narratives, Unnatural Narratology: Beyond Mimetic Models*, 2010, accessible on http://pure.au.dk/portal/files/99384930/Unnatural_narratives_unnatural_narratolo.pdf

¹⁷ 「それでも気を失うことなく遊び続けた人がこのゲームに勝ったことになるのだが、「勝つ」という言葉の意味を覚えている人ももうほとんどいなくなってしまった。」

Y. Tawada, *Fushi no shima*, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

is a “she” rather than a “he” ? In the 2011 novel *Fushi no shima* Tawada imagined herself six years after the disaster : her pessimistic perspective is reflected in this short dystopian narrative that leaves only one hope to the readers : there is still time to avoid this catastrophic scenario.

Three years later, the long novel *Kentōshi* gives a new overview of post-3/11 Japan.

Kentōshi

If *Fushi no shima* casts doubts about the identity of its narrator, so does not the long novel *Kentōshi*: the storyteller is Yoshirō, an over hundred-year-old great-grandfather who takes daily care of his great-grandson and writes stories for children. Tawada does not wait to drop a hint to the protagonist : actually the Japanese character for “Yoshi” 義 keeps the meaning of “morality, justice and honour”, suggesting the reliability of its voice. This is a clear example of Tawada’s passion for the “kotoba asobi” (word plays).

No specific indications are given to understand when the story is set. Anyway the reader discovers soon that the near future Japan is not so different from *Fushi no shima*’s predictions : Japan is an isolated country with almost no access to the Web. The mass migration of Japanese population to Okinawa prefecture is a common denominator of both novels, resulting in the transformation of Tōkyō in a ghost town.¹⁸

A remarkable difference is that this isolation now has a name : a revival of *sakoku* 鎖国, an historical period of closure to foreign countries that was adopted as national policy by Tokugawa shogunate between 1639 and 1853, year in which Japan saw the arrival of Commodore Perry’s ships to open Japanese borders for trading. The reasons of this isolation are explained by Yoshirō in person, in a conversation with his great-grandson :

“There’s isolation.”

“Why ?”

“Since every country holds serious problems, it was decided that every country solves its problems on its own in order to not let one of them spread in the world. I took you to the Shōwa Heisei Museum before, didn’t I ? Rooms were managed one by one by iron doors ; for example, even if a room goes to blaze, next rooms won’t.”

“Is it better in this way ?”

“I don’t know. But at least, if the country is isolated, the risk that Japanese business takes advantage of the poverty of other countries decreases. I also think that the risk of foreign countries’s business to take advantage of Japanese’s crisis decreases.”¹⁹”

¹⁸ Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

¹⁹

「どの国も大変な問題を抱いているんで、一つの問題が世界中に広がらないように、それぞれの国がそれぞれの問題を自分の内部で解決することに決まったんだ。前に昭和平成資

By Yoshirō's words the author stresses that Japan should not make a profit from the poverty of other countries who, for their part, should not make profits from Japanese's crisis. So Japan is in crisis : this is a remarkable point hidden between the lines but perceived throughout the novel thanks to Tawada's clues.

Apart from the repercussions of environmental changes, that once provoked the salmon extinction and the contamination of other fish fauna – impressive are children biscuits offered for sell on Japanese market but mostly made by penguin meat, once stranded on South Africa coast probably due to world-wide oil pollution – Japanese problems can be summarised in : marine pollution due to the transformation of the sea floor in landfill for household appliances ; environmental pollution exacerbated by the possibility to create private landfill for unwanted or useless objects ; economic downturn after the privatisation of Japanese companies, a phenomenon which involved mainly multiple-qualified students who manifest difficulties in finding a job despite their degrees obtained in prestigious – and expensive – universities ; exploitation of labour for a low-paid job ; a serious inflation due to the widespread idea that “food is a source for trouble²⁰” and the consequent crisis of productivity for which a barter-based market is to be preferred ; high rate of child mortality and demographic crisis ; fallacy of the public security.

What this brief list underlines, is “crisis” as a keyword for post 3/11 Japan, confirming Yoshirō's statement commented earlier. Moreover, the matrix of these problems is not national but supra-national because it is not unfamiliar to the social and political situation of many countries besides Japan. The escamotage of the dystopian device adopted by Tawada as an expedient to denounce real problems of our days highlights two features of her narrative : first, Tawada's intervention in the novel thorough the authorial “Weltanschauung” or outlook on the world, crosses national borders to give the reader a more complete overview of world's status of affairs, resulting in the realisation that Japan is not the only country to blame ; secondly, this wide authorial point of view enables the story to shift from a national related sphere to a universal dimension of the aftermath of Japanese 11th March.

If Japanese problematics do not encourage interest from foreign visitors, some positive aspects deserve a few words too : the birth of new small plant species – not to forget to mention the allusion to a Japanese classic, the *Taketori monogatari* 『竹取物語』 (“The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter”, X century)²¹ ; the transformation

料館に連れて行ってやったことがあっただろう。部屋が一つずつ鉄の扉で仕切られていて、たとえある部屋が燃えても、隣の部屋は燃えないようになっていただろう。」「その方がいいの？」「いいかどうかはわからない。でも鎖国していれば、少なくとも、日本の企業が他の国の貧しさを利用して儲ける危険が減るだろう。それから外国に企業が日本の危機を利用して儲ける危険も減ると思う。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi, op. cit.*, p. 54.

²⁰ 「食べ物は危険なのだ」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi, op. cit.*, p. 54.

²¹

「こんなに小さな竹では、たとえ月出身の赤ん坊が中で光っていたとしても、お爺さんとお婆さんは四つん這いになって虫眼鏡で捜さなければ見つけることができないだろう。」 “In such a small bamboo, even if a baby coming from the moon will shine inside, she can't be found by

of the abandoned cities in a wild forest where neither “sakura” (cherry trees), Japanese symbol par excellence, are recognisable ; insomnia due to light pollution along with the censorship on mass media – and critics’s consensus – are the main causes for the disappearance of house domestic appliances, with a consequent increase in brownouts. In this regards a positive and a negative remark should be done : the first, which sounds like a contradiction in terms, is the invention of a solar-powered fridge – to add to the one of solar-powered cloths pointing out the fashion changing ; the second can be better expressed by Yoshirō’s conversation with a shop assistant :

“Water that burns ?”
“If you start throwing into the sea huge amount of petroleum, even the sea burns.”²²

Physically, logically and humanly impossible scenario shows up in the complexity of Tawada’s “unnatural narratology”. The forthcoming Japan portrayed by the author has its pluses and minuses but both underline a change termed as an involution rather than an evolution : Japan sees a return in its early days with the triumph of nature against human technology. Unfortunately the damage is done and humans have their hands full in dealing with it.

Even though this intriguing provocation becomes food for thought about environmental pollution, human relationship steals the focus of the narration. Yoshirō’s story is brought to life thanks again to the continuous flash backs which remind the usage of a similar technique in *Fushi no shima* : a Chinese box-alike game reveals the pattern of events and only at the end of the novel the reader gets a whole idea of what happened during the 108 years of Yoshirō’s life. He was a salary man before discovering that his interests where completely different and became a professional writer ; his wife, Marika, left him after years of cohabitation which saw the light of their only child, Tennan, whose name actually hides her adult’s future : as the Japanese characters, “South Paradise” (天南) state, she moved to Okinawa together with her partner ; her only son, Himo, was rescued by Yoshirō in a difficult moment : his wife was pregnant but Himo was hospitalised in the attempt to cure an unspecified addiction ; the woman dead in childbirth – and her corpse mutated soon after in a bird-alike animal, as suggested again by Tawada’s “unnatural narratology” . Then, Yoshirō took care of the baby and named him Mumei that literary means “no name” (無名). It is exactly thorough the dialogues between the two that almost narrative comes to life, giving to Yoshirō the possibility to recall olden days.

the two elders, unless they look for her with magnifying glass on all four.” A clear reference to the story of the little girl Kaguya, princess of the moon hidden in a bamboo’s hollow; the presence of the princess made the bamboo shine and allowed a old bamboo cutter to find her and take care of her like his child. Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

²²

「燃える水ですか」 「海に大量の石油が流れ出したら、海だって燃えるでしょう。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

Some similarities with *Fushi no shima* children's condition are detectable in the weakness of young generation that need a daily care and the excellent health enjoyed by century-old people :

“But even if children die, adults can live; if adults die, children can't live²³.”

affirms Mumei with the simple attitude of an innocent child; he asks irreverent questions as every child does, although no familiar titles like “mum” or “dad” are indicative of an intimate relationship among relatives; actually the narrator explains that in the future children are labeled as “dokuritsu jidō” 独立児童 (single child)²⁴. The overturning of the most common modes of behaviour is emphasised by adults's tendency to let children be free in going with their gut. Isn't it a popular trend of our days too ? No restrictions, no rules, no examples to follow, for the sake of children's freedom. Eventually, Tawada points out in her narrative, the result is a weak generation of no-self-sufficient little people.

Kentōshi adds a sense of apathy that numbs children's perception of pain and inhibits the feeling of different tastes, sounds and smells. Even though no relation with Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings can be directly found in the novel, this state of apathy can be compared to the “muyoku ganbō” 無欲顔貌 (disinterested look) of a-bombing victims as described by Ōta Yōko in her *Shikabane no machi* 『屍の街』 (“City of corpses”)²⁵, sounding a critical note not only for the physical but also for the psychological effects of a radiation exposure on the future generation.

This horrific rollover of adults/children's role in society is not welcomed positively at least by Yoshirō who illustrates Tawada's thought about death in the following metaphor with a postcard :

If he can see the end, he feels relieved instead. When he was a child he thought by himself that the final aim of medicine was to create an eternal body that never dies. But he hasn't ever thought about the agony of an impossible death²⁶.

The thought returns to our days and the massive recourse to aesthetic surgery in the vain attempt to appear the eternal teen; a total different approach from the one

23

「でも子供が死んでも大人は生きていけるけれど、大人が死んだら子供は生きていけないよ。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁴ Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

²⁵ Yōko, Ōta, *Shikabane no machi*, Tōkyō, ed. Chūō kōronsha, 1948.

²⁶

「終わりが見えていると、かえって安心する。医学の最後目的は決して死なない永遠の身体をつくることだと子供の頃は思い込んでいたが、死ねないことの苦痛については考えてみたことがなかった。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

described in Tawada's *Kentōshi* where people try to look older – because older means healthy. Further considerations like

Among specialists, there are people who insist in the theory that “human beings are all transforming into female” and people who advocate that “children born as male are transforming into female while children born as female are transforming into male”²⁷.

light the debate around gender identity whose social movements recently played a lead role among media news for their civil right claim.

As minor changes in everyday life pets – pedigree only – can be borrowed in special shops when necessary ; bat-based artificial milk replacer is used as a general rule and no one goes jogging due to a lack in physical strength. For the same reasons most of Japanese national holidays changed their name, for instance : the “day for the respect of the aged” became the “do your best, aged ! day” while the “day of children” became the “day to apologise to children” way out to the “it’s good as long as you live-day”²⁸.”

It goes without saying but the environmental changes caused heavily alterations in weather conditions too : there is no more separation between day and night and hot and cold perceptions ; the apathy of children infected weather too – or maybe vice versa – as stated by the following passage :

When he turns out the light to go to bed, he can’t sleep because the moon is too bright. He thinks that’s a miracle that such a bright moon exists but when he opens the window the moon is not there. Only the tap of a pencil dropped in the street looks like shining²⁹.

Here Tawada’s “unnatural narratology” comes again. The fact that the moon can be so bright to avoid one’s sleep is highly doubtful in itself ; moreover, there is no bright moon out off the window but the tap of a pencil is shining instead. This is a clear example of anti-mimetic elements in the novel : in a normal world – as to say, our world – the moon cannot shine so much to steal people’s sleep (mimesis) ; in an unrealistic world, this condition can be possible by following unconventional rules typical of that fictionalised world ; but – narrator says – no moon is shining out off

²⁷

「専門家の中には「人類はすべて女性化する」という説を唱える人と、「男の子として生まれた子が女性化し、女の子として生まれた子が男性化するのだ」と説く人がいる。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁸ In Japanese, orderly: “keirō no hi” 「敬老の日」, “rōjin ga ganbare no hi” 「老人ががんばれのひ」, “kodomo no hi” 「子供の日」, “kodomo ni ayamaru hi” 「子供に謝る日」, “ikiteiru dake de iiyo no hi” 「生きているだけでいいよの日」. Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

²⁹

「電気を消して寝ようとする時と月が明るすぎて眠れない。そんなに明るい月があるものかと不思議に思って窓を開けると月は出てこない。道に落ちた鉛筆の芯だけが光って見える。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

the window (anti-mimetic element). The extraordinary power of “unnatural narratology” is masterfully used by Tawada.

Kentōshi is an ironic, thought-provoking, extremely actual narrative despite the dystopian keyword through which the novel saw its birth. This complex long-novel, descriptive rather than dialogic, is dense in terms of contents and its compact corpus without chapter subdivision do not facilitate the reading ; Tawada’s voice – the all-knowing narrator – speaks through protagonists’s thoughts – mainly referring to Yoshirō’s point of view, although a switch on Mumei’s perspective is notable too. The numerous authorial influences can be seen in any reference regarding Germany and German language, as well as in the interest demonstrated toward the mutation of language in the forthcoming Japan : English was banned and some other minor foreign languages came to the fore but since there are no relations with outside no one speaks those languages ; some words disappeared as fast as a sense of anxiety and nostalgia takes over Yoshirō – better say Tawada - life :

Who knows how would it be, the impossibility to come back to Japan
for a lifetime³⁰.

The sigh of an author who fears 3/11 here become the starting point for a fictional – real? – Japanese crisis never seen before. Nevertheless, Japanese 11th March is not mentioned and minor allusions can be difficult to recognise although present in the text ; one example is the metaphor in which Mumei slides into the pool’s water or the allusion to the impossibility to being protected by any danger. Even the conclusion of the novel, with the transformation of Mumei in an undefinable creature that falls down into the endless sea, can be seen as metaphor of the 2011 tsunami.

The title chosen for this long novel, *Kentōshi* finds its explanation in the last pages of the story. Eventually, at the age of 15 Mumei was selected to become part of a secret group of *kentōshi*, people destined to go abroad to mainly focus on studies about children’s health. A particular ritual is required to the members of *kentōshi*’s group : light up a particular candle every morning. *Kentōshi* represents, in Tawada’s perception, the highly probable future of Japan shown by her protagonists’s experiences and thoughts ; in other words, they shed light to the consequences of Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant fallout in the long period because “we always leave a candle burning in the darkness³¹.” *Kentōshi* develops *Fushi no shima*’s predictions even further but maintains intact the sense of shock and outrage felt by the author soon after Daishinsai catastrophe : three years have passed but Japanese situation is getting worth beyond comprehension.

³⁰ 「日本に一生帰れないというのは一体どんな気持ちだろう。」 Y. Tawada, *Kentōshi*, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

³¹ Moira Young, “Why is dystopia so appealing to young adults? Why is the current crop of dystopian fiction so popular with teenage readers?”, *The Guardian online*, 23 October 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/23/dystopian-fiction> (cons. 8 June 2016).

Conclusion

“Pour survivre à une catastrophe naturelle, il faut éviter d’être pris de panique et d’imaginer un tableau dramatique³².” These are the terms in which Tawada expressed herself on 13th March 2011 in many German journals, then collected in the French book entitled *Journal des jours tremblants* (2013). But this is not what is portrayed in her literature after 3/11 : the scenario depicted is dramatic and even tragic.

It goes without saying that the undeniable link that connects *Fushi no shima* and *Kentōshi* as literary responses to 3/11 catastrophe is recognisable in the former as the starting point for the latter. Although both novels depict an imagined forthcoming Japan as a “hibaku kuni” (country exposed to radiation)³³ *Fushi no shima* is likely to be considered a more intimate narrative : as the first approach of the author to 11th March disaster in this short novel narrator and writer overlap, making clear the emotional investment felt by Tawada in the following months. Actually, as stated by the novelist in the Gendai Bijinesu.net, this story was written during summer 2011 with a strong wish for Japan to be safe and without death³⁴. Eventually, the author remarks, “Le séisme touche tous les habitants, riches et pauvres. Les minorités, les politiques, les chômeurs, les élites, les enfants, et les membres de la mafia : tous sont également concernés³⁵.” The author herself must be included in this shortlist and her commitment is a natural response to the events.

On the contrary, *Kentōshi* is the result of a 2013 travel to the evacuated Fukushima areas where Tawada could get directly in touch with the victims of Tōhoku earthquake : their voices and faces have their place in the 2014 long-novel through the narrative aid of Yoshirō’s narratorial figure : the approach to the writing appears more distant but does not lack to engage readers³⁶.

A brief but important remark concerns several other publications the author devoted to the Daishinsai topic, for example : *Dōbutsutachi no baberu* 「動物たちのバベル」 (“Animals’ babel”, 2013); *Idaten doko made mo* 「韋駄天どこまでも」 (“Skandia everywhere”, 2014) first published in the *Gunzō* review in February 2014 ; *Higan* 「彼岸」 (“Equinoctial week”, 2014)³⁷ ;

³² Yōko Tawada, *Journal des jours tremblants : Après Fukushima précédé de Trois leçons de poésie*, Paris, ed. Verdier, 2013, p. 93.

³³ Saeko, Kimura, “Sakkatachi wa “3.11” wo dō egaitekita no ka ~ “Shinsai bungakuron” saishinsaku wo ikkyo shōkai!”, *Gendai Bijinesu*, 4 March 2016, <http://gendai.ismedia.jp/articles/-/48063> (cons. 8 June 2016).

³⁴ Yōko Tawada, “Kentōshi wo megutte”, *Gendai Bijinesu*, 15 November 2014, <http://gendai.ismedia.jp/articles/-/40935> (cons. 8 June 2016).

³⁵ Yōko Tawada, *Journal des jours tremblants*, op. cit., p. 95.

³⁶ S., Kimura, “Sakkatachi wa “3.11” wo dō egaitekita no ka”, “Sakkatachi wa “3.11” wo dō egaitekita no ka ~ “Shinsai bungakuron” saishinsaku wo ikkyo shōkai!”

³⁷ Yōko Tawada, “Dōbutsutachi no baberu”, *Subaru*, Tōkyō, ed. Shūeisha, August 2013. Yōko Tawada, “Idaten doko made mo”, *Hen'ai shōsetsushū*, Tōkyō, ed. Kōdansha, 2014. Yōko Tawada, “Higan”, *Waseda bungaku*, Tōkyō, ed. Waseda bungaku, November 2014.

and the multilingual play entitled 夕陽の昇るとき～STILL FUKUSHIMA～ Wenn die Abendsonne aufgeht (“When the setting sun rises”) performed in Berlin in 2014 and in Japan in 2015.

Among others, the *Kumo wo tsukamu hanashi* 『雲をつかむ話』 (“Cloud-catcher story”, 2013)³⁸ novel is noteworthy. This long-story has been published since January 2011 on Gunzō but was affected by 11th March disaster to the point of bullying the author into a radical change in plot to talk about Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant fallout. The author expresses, through her protagonist, the anxiety toward the possibility of an everlasting non-return to Japan as a repercussion to 11th March 2011 : the fear of becoming statelessness is portrayed several times in her literary production enough to consider it as a leitmotif that calls into question her identity as a Japanese-German writer who always crosses national and linguist borders.

In conclusion, Tawada’s post-literary responses to Fukushima disaster have been notably influenced by the fear of nuclear radiation and question the responsibility of Japanese government³⁹. What is remarkable in Tawada’s view of future Japan, is that death is no more seen in a negative viewpoint but as an unexpected chance stolen by radioactivity contamination⁴⁰. Moreover, by her dystopian approach, the author emphasises radioactivity contamination as a perpetual problem involving future generations too. From this perspective, to talk about post-Fukushima narrative or post-3/11 literary responses is arguable : the label can be accepted only as a simple narrative expedient in terms of time frame.

The aporia perceived throughout Tawada’s literary responses to Fukushima disaster does not diminish the aesthetic value of the literary work but goes all along with the unnatural style of writing typical of the author : the metaphysical boundaries are transcended by putting on the stage human-like beings as well as inanimate objects who move backward and forward in time. These features, all distinctive of the already mentioned “unnatural narratology” are particularly notable in the description of the forthcoming Fukushima scenario. The illogical rules of Tawada’s storyworld cast doubts about the real possibility that, due to the radioactivity contamination, a biological mutation could give birth to a new race of human beings – human/animal-alike creatures – to start crawling the earth. This is also one of the reason why, although Katastrophe-centered, Tawada’s post-3/11 narrative is appreciated by the great public who enjoys the ironic and weird Kafka-like fictional experimentations with humour⁴¹.

³⁸ Yōko Tawada, *Kumo wo tsukamu hanashi*, Tōkyō, ed. Kōdansha, 2014.

³⁹ Sachiyo Taniguchi, “Tawada Yōko no bungaku ni okeru kyōkai: yūhi no noboru toki~STILL FUKUSHIMA~” wo chūshin ni”, 10 March 2015, <http://teapot.lib.ocha.ac.jp/ocha/bitstream/10083/57237/1/p.55-64.pdf> (cons. 8 June 2016).

⁴⁰ Katsura Matsumoto, ”3.11” wo meguru gendaishōsetsu 3. Tawada Yōko “Fushi no shima” ni hono mire kibō”, 1 January 2016, <http://m.kaji-ka.jp/daily/review/kotoba/5417> (cons. 8 June 2016).

⁴¹ Yōko Tawada, “Die Ruhe im Sturm. Das Wort Katastrophe klingt für japanische Ohren anders als für deutsche”, 14 March 2011, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/yoko-tawada-ueber-deutsche-sprache-die-ruhe-im-sturm/3950332.html> (cons. 8 June 2016). Rivka Galchen, “Yoko Tawada’s

Further reasons can be found in the choice of dystopia as a narrative keyword for Tawada's responses to the Daishinsai: the author confessed many times the "angoisse surdimensionnée⁴²" provoked by the broadcasted images from Tōhoku areas soon after 11th March: the writer was not able to stand and watch them for a long time. Hence, dystopia can represent the comfortable choice to fight against the refuse to deal with the catastrophe in real time.

11th March three-fold catastrophe pointed out Japanese weakness: a vulnerable political and social system emerges thorough Tawada's denunciation. But the consequences of the Fukushima Daiichi fallout in the next generations are not the only concern of Japanese authority: the threat of an upcoming great earthquake, namely, the Really Big One⁴³ risks to throw into panic Japanese people again:

On dit aussi que, d'ici vingt à trente ans, un séisme d'une amplitude supérieur risque d'ébranler le Japon. Le temps qui nous reste est compté⁴⁴.

Veronica De Pieri

Dr. Veronica De Pieri is currently a Ph.D. candidate in Japanese studies at Ca' Foscari University of Venice under a cotutelle programme with Paris INALCO. Dr. De Pieri's research is focused on the literature of the catastrophe with a special emphasis on *genbaku bungaku* and the literary responses to Fukushima disaster. She is also embarking on an academic career, which has embraced teaching Japanese language to DSA-affected students. Dr De Pieri is collaborating with the Network of Translators for the Globalization of the Testimonies of Atomic Bomb Survivors and is a member of Orto dei Sogni, a Fukushima non-profit organization.

Magnificent Strangeness", *The New Yorker*, 19 October 2012, <http://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/yoko-tawadas-magnificent-strangeness> (cons. 8 June 2016).

⁴² Yōko Tawada, *Journal des jours tremblants*, *op. cit.* and Y. Tawada, "Kentōshi wo megutte".

⁴³ Many articles have been written on this topics but the suggestions goes to Kathryn Schulz, "The Really Big One", *The New Yorker*, 20 July 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2015/07/20/the-really-big-one> (cons. 29 April 2016).

⁴⁴ Y. Tawada, *Journal des jours tremblants*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.