

# Nuclear Narratives: Ecofeminism and the Nuclear Crises in Selected Works by Hayashi Kyōko and Kawakami Hiromi

CATHERINE REGINA H. BORLAZA

## Abstract

This paper attempts to adopt insights from ecofeminism to analyze selected works on nuclear power by two Japanese writers, Kyōko Hayashi and Hiromi Kawakami. I primarily analyze Hayashi's novella "From Trinity to Trinity" alongside other works that have established her as a chronicler of the lives of the *hibakusha* (atomic bomb victims), and Kawakami's two versions of "Kamisama" written in 1994 and 2011, and her afterword to the 2011 version. Though these two authors are writing in response to two different nuclear events in Japan's history—the atomic bombing of Nagasaki during World War II in 1945 and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011—their works explore ecofeminist insights on the instrumentalization of nature, informed by the conceptual links between various spheres of domination, and on the alternative relationships humans can foster with nonhuman entities, grounded on an ethics of compassion and care.

## Keywords

Ecofeminism, Japanese literature, atomic bomb literature, post-Fukushima fiction, nuclear power

## Author Note

Catherine Regina H. Borlaza teaches courses on writing and comparative literature with

the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of the Philippines Diliman, where she graduated with a bachelor's degree in Comparative Literature, specializing in Asian literatures. She obtained her master's degree in International Culture and Communication Studies with a focus on Visual Culture from Waseda University, Japan. Her research interests include women's writing, popular culture and subculture in Japan, and media studies, particularly anime.



## **Nuclear Narratives: Ecofeminism and the Nuclear Crises in Selected Works by Hayashi Kyōko and Kawakami Hiromi**

An uneasy and complicated relationship exists between feminism, ecology, and the environment in Japan. Since Japan's rapid economic growth in the 1950s-1970s, women have frequently been at the forefront of grassroots movements and social protests against some of the most severe environmental disasters in Japan. Some of these disasters with long-term and far-reaching effects that have mobilized women include the deadly incidents of industrial pollution and toxic contamination in Yokkaichi and Minamata, which triggered an outbreak of diseases and health problems from the 1950s to 1970s, and the nuclear meltdown at the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant in 2011 (Wöhr, "Ecology" 53; Karan 39; Freiner 5). Despite women's active participation in environmental activism, journalist and women's rights activist Yayori Matsui points out that they "do not necessarily espouse feminist views"; neither are "mainstream feminists" particularly interested in ecology (Matsui qtd. in "Ecology" 53). It is for this reason that Ulrike Wöhr claims that "Japan has not seen the development of a strong ecofeminist tradition" ("Ecology" 53).

This paper situates itself within this gap by attempting to adopt insights from ecofeminism to analyze selected works on nuclear power by two Japanese writers, Kyōko Hayashi and Hiromi Kawakami. I primarily analyze Hayashi's novella "From Trinity to Trinity" alongside other works that have established her as a chronicler of the lives of the *hibakusha* (atomic bomb victims), and Kawakami's two versions of "Kamisama" written in 1994 and 2011 and her afterword to the 2011 version. Though these two authors are writing in response to two different nuclear events in Japan's history—the atomic bombing of Nagasaki during World War II in 1945 and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster in 2011—their works explore ecofeminist insights on the instrumentalization of nature, informed by the conceptual links between various spheres of domination and on the alternative relationships humans can foster with nonhuman entities grounded on an ethics of compassion and care.

To define ecofeminism, I refer to one of its proponents Val Plumwood, who says it consists of a body of literature that takes as its central theme "the link between the domination of

women and the domination of nature” (“Ecofeminism” 120). As a form of intellectual critique grounded in political activism, it seeks to analyze and expose deeper and broader intersections and interconnections among various spheres of power and privilege, such as gender, sexuality, class, religion, race, ethnicity, and culture. Ecofeminism, therefore, reveals how the oppression of humans and nature can be traced “not from a single system such as patriarchy, capitalism, or anthropocentrism... but from a system of interlocking, oppressive structures based on a series of hierarchical dualisms that lie at the heart of Western culture” (Gaard, “Women, Water, Energy” 159). These dualisms manifest as binary oppositions, wherein one of the two terms is deemed subordinate to, inferior to, or wholly dependent on the other privileged term. Some notable examples of these dualisms include male/female, culture/nature, master/slave, rationality/animality, human/nature (nonhuman), and civilized/primitive (nature) (158-159). For Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva, this structural division and analogous subordination of women/nature to man and their associated concepts are enabled by the “capitalist patriarchy world system” (2). This system, Mies and Shiva explain, “emerged, is built upon and maintains itself through the colonization of women, of ‘foreign’ people and their lands; and of nature” (2), which has tremendously exacerbated the violence committed not only toward women, children, and the whole of humanity, but also toward the larger biosphere. Ecofeminism, then, is concerned with exposing these interlocking oppressive structures and with the survival and preservation of life.

Critics like Tomoko Onabe have claimed that ecofeminism has not provided “pragmatic solutions to the inequities of the status quo” and “constructive and effective” theories to address criticism concerning the essentialist assumptions it makes about the link between nature and women, or divisions within the movement since its advancements specifically in the United States in the 1990s (112-114). There has been, however, vigorous and sustained engagement with ecofeminism and a critical rethinking of core issues and approaches across and in connection with various disciplines and discursive and cultural contexts<sup>1</sup>. The recently published *Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* provides some clues to the development of ecofeminism, specifically in the field of literary studies. The trajectories charted in the Handbook may be situated within the third stage of ecofeminism’s theoretical development, where its “continued vitality”

---

1 See, for example, Greta Gaard (2017) and handbooks on ecofeminism edited by Mary Philips and Nick Rumens (2016) and Douglas Vakoch (2025).

is sustained by an interrogation of its foundational assumptions and its potential to be integrated into and benefit from “critiques of essentialism and eurocentricism” (Gaard, *Critical Ecofeminism* xv). In addition to chapters that explore core issues and approaches to ecofeminism and that examine how literary periods and genres can be used as starting points to thinking about formal and thematic concerns linked to it, several chapters are also devoted to exploring ecofeminist literary practices in non-Western cultural and linguistic contexts, such as Chinese, Taiwanese, Philippine, Vietnamese, Tamil, Hindi, African, Arabic, and Brazilian literatures. Patrick Murphy acknowledges that one of the limitations of the Handbook is that it is unable to represent every country or language (though this is practically impossible), explaining how “ecofeminism has not made equal strides in entering the halls of academia or been taken up by authors in every country in equal measure” (1). Such is the case in Japan.

Scholars such as Onabe, Keitaro Morita, and Wöhr have weighed in on why ecofeminism has not firmly taken root in local environmental and feminist movements and discourses.<sup>2</sup> Morita, however, has observed a surge in reconsidering and reviving interest in ecofeminism after the triple disasters of 3/11 (1). The meltdown of three nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant, caused by the magnitude-9 Great East Japan Earthquake and the subsequent tsunami, is considered “the worst nuclear disaster since Chernobyl in 1986” (Yoshimoto 29) and has resurfaced and rearticulated discourses on Japan’s history with nuclear weapons and its present use of nuclear power. “The disaster,” according to Wöhr, “has not only increased people’s doubts about the technological controllability and economic viability of nuclear power, it has also sparked new enquiries into the political and societal circumstances of Japan’s adopting and promoting this extremely risky business” (“Gender and citizenship” 230). In conjunction with this, “past and present movements

---

2 Wöhr cites three causes: 1) women’s skepticism toward the environmental movement because of the reproduction of hierarchical divisions of labor based on gender, “relegating women to subordinate roles” (52); 2) women’s complicity “in shifting major risks of technological development and progress” as part of Japan’s “unbridled industrial development” and economic expansion to other Asian countries (55); and 3) the widely misunderstood debate between ecofeminist Aoki Yayoi and Marxist feminist Ueno Chizuko regarding the conceptualization and adoption of ecofeminist theory and practice in Japan (56). Keitaro examines these points of convergence in the Aoki-Ueno debate and stresses that the debate and the misinterpretation of Aoki’s version of cultural ecofeminism “has muted the potential for the development of ecofeminism in Japan” (11). Onabe provides more alternatives by identifying three interlinked causes: 1) Japanese environmental movements have historically advocated and taken advantage of maternal images that have reinforced essentialist notions about femininity and nature; 2) Japanese feminists revising feminist history exposed the collaboration between leading feminists and fascism during World War II (115); and 3) lacking a strong conceptual understanding of ecofeminism led to connection “feminine ecological images” with the emperor that philosopher Asada Akira feared could “strengthen the authority of the Emperor system” (qtd. in Onabe 122).

and discourses are being re-examined,” particularly informed by gender, which has always been enmeshed in struggles over nuclear power (230). Wöhr asserts that “not only the movement against nuclear power but also the nuclear industry and the politics supporting it are—since their early postwar beginnings—deeply implicated in constructions of male as well as female gender” (“From Hiroshima to Fukushima” 203). Gender stereotypes and relations, for example, seep into the dynamics between leaders and political activists in civil movements against nuclear power, and undergird and construct certain discourses, tropes, and images associated with nuclear power (“Gender and citizenship” 231-237).

To further explore these convergences of gender and nuclear power in reconsidering the place of ecofeminism in Japan, this paper examines selected works by Kyōko Hayashi and Hiromi Kawakami, primarily Hayashi’s novella “From Trinity to Trinity” alongside other works that have established her as a chronicler of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki, and Kawakami’s 1994 and 2011 versions of “Kamisama” and her afterword to the 2011 version. Both respond to different nuclear events in Japanese history—the atomic bombing of Nagasaki on August 9, 1945, and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011. The circumstances, the perpetrators, and the nature and scale of the impact of these two events are different, and lumping them together may risk erasing these differences. But, as scholars and writers<sup>3</sup> such as Hayashi and Kawakami themselves have argued, the link between these nuclear events has implications for Japan’s past, present, and future, and for humanity as a whole.

To examine these nuclear events in Japan’s history as they are represented in literary works raises several questions tied to issues concerning representation and form: How do we represent such events given their traumatic nature? How do we represent the invisibility but pervasiveness of radiation? Are there forms intertwined with specific ways of thinking about nuclear power? In my analysis, I explore Hayashi’s and Kawakami’s techniques of

---

3 Nobel prize-winning author and long-time activist Kenzaburō Ōe has emphasized this link between the atomic bombing of Hiroshima (and by extension, Nagasaki) and the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear meltdown, but claims that the latter was a “more dramatic catastrophe” compared to the earthquake that triggered it, “precisely because it was man-made.” He further condemns Japan’s venture into the nuclear business for “industrial productivity” and the construction of nuclear reactors as a “betrayal of the memory of Hiroshima’s [and Nagasaki’s] victims” (“History Repeats”). Linking Fukushima and atomic bombing, moreover, given the renewed interest in re-examining Japan’s nuclear history, “is vital given the historical struggles of anti-atomic bomb movements to protest against nuclear weapons, and of their victims to gain recognition and health benefits from a recalcitrant government” (DiNitto, “Hiroshima Encore” 90). Beyond its significance within Japan, Kazuo Kuroko argues that “the accident at Fukushima NPP was a global event on the order of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, one that easily exceeds national bounds and affects the future of humanity” (qtd. in DiNitto, “Hiroshima Encore” 90).

rewriting and juxtaposition in representing these nuclear events, which serve to emphasize various interconnections and convergences—temporal, geographic, and subjective—and utilize insights from ecofeminism to unpack these connections.

I begin my analysis by briefly introducing Hayashi and situating her work “From Trinity to Trinity” within the mesh of prior works that have established her as a *genbaku sakka* (“atomic bomb writer”) (Shan 122). Doing so demonstrates how Hayashi has determinedly rewritten August 9th to probe its enduring and extensive effects. Born in Nagasaki in 1930, Hayashi spent most of her childhood in wartime Shanghai, where her father was stationed at the Mitsui Corporation from 1931 to 1945. She returned to Nagasaki in 1945 and was enrolled as a student in Nagasaki Girls’ High School when she experienced the bombing on August 9th. At that time, Hayashi was mobilized at the Mitsubishi Munitions Plant, which was just 1.3 kilometers away from the epicenter of the bombing. Some of her works translated into English that have established her as a *genbaku sakka* chronicling the lives of the *hibakusha* (atomic bomb victims) include her debut autobiographical novel “Ritual of Death” published in the Japanese monthly literary magazine *Gunzo*, which won the Akutagawa Prize and the Gunzo Prize; her novella “Masks of Whatchamacallit: A Nagasaki Tale” which was also first published in *Gunzo*; and her collection of twelve short stories *Cut Glass, Blown Glass*.

The three texts above share striking similarities, which highlight Hayashi’s inclination to persistently rewrite her experience of August 9th as a *hibakusha*, a survivor of the bombing. To begin with, their respective narrators—Hayashi writing as herself in her autobiographical works, and the protagonists in her stories that narrate events loosely based on her own experiences—recount their fleeing from the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. Moreover, time in these narratives is discontinuous in the sense that the past and the present intertwine. Finally, by incorporating or shifting between various perspectives, these narratives expose the uneven effects of the atomic bombing. These specific techniques and themes frame my analysis of “From Trinity to Trinity,” one of the two novellas included in her Noma Literary Prize-winning work *Human Experiences Over a Long Time*.

Regarding the first point, the stories “Ritual of Death,” “Masks of Whatchamacallit,” and “Dear Friend” and “Echoes” from *Cut Glass, Blown Glass* all feature protagonists recounting their fleeing from the August 9th bombing of Nagasaki. “Ritual of Death” chronicles Hayashi’s own experience of the atomic bombing—her miraculous escape from

it. Loosely based on Hayashi's experiences, the narrator in "Masks of Whatchamacallit" similarly recounts early on in the narrative her and her friend Takako's survival and escape after the atomic bombing of Nagasaki. "Dear Friend" revolves around the narrator's homecoming twenty-seven years after the bombing, which prompts her to reflect not only on the moment of the bombing itself and her escape, but also on memories of her hometown before and after. In "Echoes," Hayashi recounts her and her mother fleeing from Nagasaki to their home in Isahaya, juxtaposing the event with the fleeing of Chinese refugees driven from their homes during the Battle of Shanghai. Across these texts, August 9th is repeatedly referred to and returned to by Hayashi, a traumatic event in Japanese history that she has been criticized for fetishizing, according to critics like Kōjin Karatani and Kenji Nakagami (Bhowmik 65). Her stories, however, suggest that it is impossible to escape this singular event—to merely contain it to a date—as its effects on the lives of *hibakusha* stretch "indefinitely toward an unknowable future" (59). This effect is also largely achieved through the second point above: Hayashi's treatment of time, where the past and the present intertwine.

Within these narratives, time is noticeably discontinuous, taking on different forms and manners of representation, and serving different purposes. In "Ritual of Death" and "Masks of Whatchamacallit," the bomb serves as a fixed referent for various temporal periods woven into Hayashi's works: events before the bomb, the moment of the bombing, and after the bombing are narrated non-linearly and interlaced with other texts, such as letters, news reports, and medical data, that are time-bound too. In the short story "Echoes," Hayashi and her mother fleeing Nagasaki to return to Isahaya on August 13, 1945, prompts her to recall a childhood memory of the Chinese refugees fleeing their homes on December 8, 1941, when Izumo, the flagship of the Japanese navy, attacked Shanghai. Juxtaposing her experiences in Shanghai and after the bombing of Nagasaki, Hayashi intended to make them "echo each other and make the war at the start of my life and the present echo each other. I want to tie them into a ring" (Hayashi qtd. in Shan 297). In "Dear Friend," the narrator, after several years of detaching herself from the site of the bombing, returns and inevitably confronts changes to the landscape after the bombing, realizing her complacency in attempting to evade the bomb: "That day and today existed within me, side by side, in parity. Perhaps because I had become used to accepting things as they came, my senses seemed to have dulled toward both the original August 9th and the current state of peace" (103).

One final characteristic of Hayashi's works particularly worth emphasizing is her incorporation of multiple perspectives to bring into relief the uneven effects of the bombing. In "Ritual of Death" and "Dear Friend," Hayashi merges various perspectives of victims and survivors of the bombing, highlighting how the severity of the effects depended on one's proximity to the epicenter. The effects of internal radiation exposure on *hibakusha*, moreover, differed too depending on one's sex and gender, which Hayashi vividly describes in "Masks of Whatchamacallit." In "Echoes," it becomes apparent with the juxtaposition of Hayashi's childhood memory of the Battle of Shanghai and her present experience of the bombing of Nagasaki, that it is impossible to talk about Japan's victimization during the Pacific War without acknowledging its colonial exploits across Asia. Hayashi refuses to allow the memory of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to facilitate "the forgetting of [Japan's] history of colonialism and racism in the region" (Yoneyama 12).

Echoing a motif that characterizes much of Hayashi's previous works, "Trinity to Trinity" revolves around the atomic bombing of August 9th. At the beginning of the novella, Hayashi reflects on one of her New Year's resolutions to mark the turn of the century: to embark on a pilgrimage to the Trinity Site of the Manhattan Project, where the US conducted its first experiment to detonate an atomic bomb. For Hayashi, this pilgrimage was part of her ongoing process of making sense of August 9th, and severing her ties with it:

Trinity was the departure point of my August 9th. It was also the terminal point for me as a *hibakusha*: from Trinity to Trinity. By traveling this circuit, I would absorb the August 9th hanging between those points in my life cycle. I would put an end to my ties to August 9th, which were impossible to sever by swallowing them. (4)

Instead of fleeing from the bomb, as the protagonists and the narrators of her previous works have done, Hayashi in "Trinity to Trinity" sets out to seek its origins. Although she had thought that visiting the test site for the bombing would help her move past the pain of the bombing, it is impossible to totally escape the memory and effects of August 9th for atomic bomb survivors, as many of her previous works have chronicled and suggested. But Hayashi realizes through her pilgrimage to the Trinity Site that the magnitude of destruction and death affects not only humanity but also extends to the nonhuman that are considered the forebearers of nuclear damage and destruction. By juxtaposing the familiar

and unfamiliar, the past and the present, Hayashi meditates on the forces—“natural,” “human,” and scientific—that have shaped and transformed the earth.

Her meditation on this is evident in what she finds particularly striking about the mesas: they are unlike mountains in Japan, calling to mind the pilgrimage she and a close friend, another *hibakusha*—Kana—had promised to embark on in Shikoku, before the Trinity Site. According to Hayashi, “the mesas that I saw for the first time seemed mysterious. These blocks of red clay—perhaps no man-made edifice outdoes them in size—were stately, large, and tall, and completely flat on top. Moreover, they did not have such petty-minded, gently spreading skirts, as would be expected of Japanese mountains” (11). She attributes the unique formations of these mesas to the work of nature: “Passing winds brushed away the first, and the rain and light chiseled the earth’s surface, sculpting plateaus in the course of hundreds of millions of years” (12). Hayashi not only places these two geographic formations side by side, but she also juxtaposes the past and the present. The holes that have formed on the mesas and the rocks that have chipped off from the surface, its “dead members” (13), prompt Hayashi to remember seats left vacant in her class, belonging to those who did not survive the bombing. The link she makes spatially and temporally here sets up the forces of nature and human will that she probes throughout her essay. Hayashi observes that, while “never gentle,” nature acts without “ill will” (16); humans, however, time and time again, have been driven by greed in asserting their own will, to the detriment of human life and the environment.

The assertion of the will of the US in justifying and commemorating the development and dropping of the atomic bombs is what Hayashi confronts as she visits the National Atomic Museum. Hayashi walks through an exhibition on “the history of the ‘ATOMIC BOMB,’” an assemblage that consists of: photographs paying tribute to J. Robert Oppenheimer, the father of the atomic bomb and the director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory during World War II—a “hero” in the eyes of Americans, a *kokuzo* or “public enemy” to the Japanese; a map showing the route of the Bock’s Car that dropped the atomic bomb in Nagasaki; a documentary about the Hiroshima-Nagasaki bombing; and photographs of ruinous landscapes in Nagasaki after the bombing (6-8). By juxtaposing her own experience and perspective as a *hibakusha* and how the atomic bombing is framed and commemorated in the Museum from the perspective of “victors” (14), eliciting pride from white spectators, Hayashi calls into question a “myth” she had believed was “common sense,” that of the necessity to abolish nuclear weapons (8).

Given Hayashi's inclination for juxtaposing events, it is not surprising that she reflects on other forms of myths and instances of man asserting their own will on others. Referring to and incorporating quotes from historical documents, Hayashi narrates attempts by Spanish explorers to colonize New Mexico, "[e]nticed by the native American legend," "in search of the city of treasure and gold," citing the expedition of friars Silvestre Escalante and Anastasio Domínguez as an example (10). Hayashi observes that much of the landscape of Santa Fe, which she and her friend Tsukiko traverse to get to the Science Museum, was once a "golden city," "a wilderness where no white culture can prosper," but has been exploited, "pioneered by aggressors' greed" and made into sites for "bloody battles" (10).

Finally reaching the terminal point of her pilgrimage, Ground Zero at the Trinity Site, Hayashi sees a land bereft of life: "Living creatures on the wild land were silenced before they could even assume an attack posture" (22). She realizes the intimate link she shares with the land as it first experienced the destructive power of the nuclear bomb: "Until I stood on Trinity Site, I had thought that the first victims of nuclear damage on earth were us humans. I was wrong. There were elderly victims here. They were here, without being able to weep or cry out" (23). In this passage, Hayashi decenters her own experience of the bombing, circling back to her childhood, but going even further back, invoking the land that was damaged by nuclear power: "as I started walking toward the unknown place called Ground Zero, I had returned to 'a time' before experiencing August 9th. When I stood before the Monument, I experienced the true bombing" (23).

The juxtaposition of these events and perspectives highlights the overwhelming domination of man over beings considered less than them: colonizer and colonized, man and earth. For Mies and Shiva, under the project of colonization, women, nature, "the colonized and the 'naturalized'" were "'opened up' for 'free exploitation and subordination' by colonizers, transformed into 'others' or 'objects'" (7). The exploitative drive and resulting relationship that exists in the colonial extraction of resources and the expansion of territory through myth quests, grounded in conceptually linked gendered relations, is also apparent in the development of science and technology, where the latter two terms, as Mies and Shiva point out, "are not gender neutral": "the relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature (shaped by reductionist modern science since the 16th century), and the exploitative and oppressive relation between men and women that prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern, industrial ones, were closely connected" (3).

These conceptual links between the parallel domination of one force over another stem from an instrumentalist view, according to Plumwood:

the traditional role of both women and nature has been conceived as an instrumental one. Both have been valued either entirely or mainly in terms of their usefulness to others (e.g., to males in the case of women and to humans in the case of nature) who are taken as valuable in and for themselves. Similarly in both cases, there has been an attempt to impose a sharp separation on a natural continuum, in one case between the characteristics of sex, and in the other case between the characteristics of humans and non-humans, so that the distance between each side is maximized in a polarity. (“Ecofeminism” 120)

Here, I not only discuss Hayashi’s “From Trinity to Trinity,” but also bring in Kawakami’s afterword to “God Bless You, 2011,” to show how both reflect on the unethical claim of modern science to master and conquer nature, and how this intertwines with the survival and well-being of both human and nonhuman entities. Mies critiques a particular attitude adopted by modern science—“a science,” she says, “which knows neither feelings, nor morals, nor responsibility,” which conceives of “advancement,” “development,” or “progress” in terms of technologies and tools of violence and destruction (xxiii). Nuclear power is one of these inventions, a form of “military science and technology” (51) adopted by the state or supported by corporations for profit, fully capable of destroying lives, but unable to restore them (xix, 52).

In reaction to nuclear energy as a form of modern science, Kawakami, in her afterword, reflects on the disconnection that humans feel toward the tradition and ancient beliefs in gods, a kind of spirituality often associated with nature, seen in “God Bless You” with the bear character invoking the presence and blessing of the gods toward the end of the story. This disconnection felt toward spirits becomes the basis for the domination and instrumentalization of nature by humans, as Kawakami makes apparent in her reflection on the element of uranium in the afterword. According to her, this element is naturally occurring, resting inert underground or deep in the mountains. Human beings, however, have exploited and harnessed its power to wreak destruction in the form of atomic bombs such as the ones dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II in 1945. Kawakami further laments that this element could have quietly emitted radiation without

much significant effect and decayed naturally. This element is misused/abused by humans in the name of science, but a darker agenda, one vested with political interest, informs experimentations with this element: “people thought, let’s put them to work for us now. And they didn’t fool around, either. Germany concentrated more on nuclear power, while countries like the United States, Great Britain, Russia and Japan focused on building nuclear bombs.” (par. 15)

In a similar vein, Hayashi, in “From Trinity to Trinity,” expresses Doctor S’s criticism of the reckless use of nuclear weapons in World War II by powerful warring states who stand above everyone like supposed gods who “act as if the world were their own” (1). Hayashi’s and Kawakami’s reflections on the development of nuclear energy resonate with many of the points raised by Mies and Shiva in their work, specifically, the field being divested of interest and ethics—impartial, indifferent toward its “object” of research (38)—which has, in turn, made it amenable to political control and warfare.

If such an attitude adopted by science were to persist, it would be detrimental to the survival of humanity and of the planet, as Kawakami highlights in her afterword. Not only is science to be held accountable for such an instrumental view of nature, but generally, humans hold this view in that we are entitled to freely exhaust and exploit the planet’s natural resources. These interactions, however, have dire consequences for the environment and our own survival as species extinctions and life-threatening disasters and catastrophes are interrelated to man-made development and contemporary consumerism (xviii). Given this, it is crucial to change our perspective and our relations to the earth. To quote Shiva:

The ecological shift involves not seeing ourselves as outside the ecological web of life, as masters, conquerors and owners of the Earth’s resources. It means seeing ourselves as members of the Earth family, with responsibility to care for other species and life on Earth in all its diversity, from the tiniest microbe to the largest mammal. It creates the imperative to live, produce, and consume within ecological limits and within our share of ecological space, without encroaching on the rights of other species and people. (xxi)

In reorienting our relation to the earth, several displacements must occur—“ecological humility” or the recognition of our ties with nonhuman entities in place of “arrogance”;

and “ecological responsibility” or the commitment to care, deeply consider, and exercise compassion for non-human entities in place of “careless and blind exercise of power, control, and violence” (xxi). Grounding this ecofeminist perspective on cooperation, mutual care, and love, we should be able to restore our relationship to the planet and ensure the survival of the diversity of life and our overall well-being, according to Shiva. Kawakami’s two versions of “God Bless You” offers insights into reorienting and rethinking our relationship with the nonhuman, specifically animals.

Kawakami Hiromi was born in Tokyo in 1958. She is one of the most well-recognized authors in Japan, having won numerous local and international literary awards. Her short story “Kamisama,” translated as “God Bless You,” won the Pascal Short Story Prize for Newcomers in 1994. She would later rewrite “Kamisama,” translated as “God Bless You, 2011,” in light of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. The original version appears in her debut short story collection of the same title (Kamisama, 1998), which won the Murasaki Shikibu Literary Prize and the Bunkamura Deux Magots Literary Prize. Some of her other award-winning works include *Hebi wo fumu* (“Tread On a Snake”) published in 1996 which won the Akutagawa Prize, *Sensei no Kaban (The Briefcase/Strange Weather in Tokyo)* which won the Tanizaki Prize in 2001 and was shortlisted for the 2012 Man Asian Literary Prize and the 2014 Independent Foreign Fiction Prize, and *Under the Eye of the Big Bird* which was shortlisted for the 2025 International Book Prize. Before becoming a writer, Kawakami was a high school biology teacher, which in turn influenced her own preoccupations as a writer:

When I write a novel, I wonder what man is. What will happen when there will be too many humans, myself included. What will their relations look like. You can think of all this in the context of literature, but biology is a science that makes us think about the relations of a living being, which a human is, with other animals and plants in nature; about what systems they belong to, whether they are living beings and so on. In a sense, it all affects my way of thinking when writing. (Kawakami qtd. in Ho-Chi 88)

Her stories usually revolve around encounters between human and nonhuman entities with “fantastic twists occurring within the everyday” (DiNitto, “Writing Human Disaster” 334). Mina Quio and Matthew Strecher write about the relationship between the fantastic

and the real or everyday in Kawakami's writing, where "a sense of strangeness" is palpably felt throughout the narrative but "is fully internalized by the characters, to the extent that they no longer recognize the fantastical, whether in anthropomorphized animals or the invisible presence of humans" (163). The former of these two fantastic elements is what Kawakami focuses on in her two versions of her short story "Kamisama," translated as "God Bless You" and "God Bless You, 2011."

"God Bless You, 2011" is widely recognized as one of the first works published after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster on March 11, 2011. The 1994 version narrates a pleasant hike and picnic between the narrator and a bear. In the rewritten 2011 version, the events proceed in the same manner, but the effects of the nuclear meltdown have completely changed the landscape and tone of the original. Kawakami's rewriting of the original shows how pervasive the effects of the nuclear disaster are, yet, they have become uncannily normalized, and the juxtaposition of the narrator and bear compels us to rethink the relationship between the human and nonhuman during times of disasters and crises.

At the start of the 2011 version, Kawakami immediately changes a mundane detail in the 1994 version. In the latter, the narrator remarks that before the bear's invite, she had taken a stroll along the same road in spring to see the snipes, "but this was the first time [she] had gone in hot weather" (par. 1). In the 2011 version, this particular line is changed: "but then I had worn protective clothing; now it was hot, and for the first time since the 'incident' I would be clad in normal clothes that exposed the skin" (par.1). The "incident" is unnamed, but the referent is obvious based on several details Kawakami rewrites in the 2011 version. For example, the bear's nondescript history with one of the relatives of the narrator, who was of "huge help" to him, is given more context that hints of the 3/11 disaster: the narrator's relative helped the bear "when he was in the evacuation center there during the 'incident'" (par.4). Changes in how the setting was rendered in the 2011 version, moreover, show what became of the exposed area specifically after the nuclear disaster. The rice fields in the 1992 version are barren in the 2011 version, "turned up during the process of decontamination," (par. 7) and the light traffic of cars and lack of pedestrians by the roadside also gain new meaning after "the incident": "Maybe they're keeping a distance because we are not wearing protective suits" (par. 7). The river, buzzing with people swimming, fishing, and gathering along the bank in the 1994 version, is empty in the 2011 version: Before the 'incident,' this had been a lively place where people swam and fished, and families brought their children. Now, however, there were no children left

anywhere in the area” (par. 13). Radioactive elements are also added to the narrative, clearly in reference to the nuclear disaster. Strontium and Plutonium are mentioned by the two men in protective gear as they claim that bears are more resistant to these than humans, while cesium contaminates the water inhabited by the fish in the river.

Strangely, the characters in Kawakami’s narrative seem unaffected, apathetic, and even accepting of these extreme environmental changes, which reflects what Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto finds uncanny about the nuclear disaster:

There is no question that the Fukushima nuclear accident marked a decisive turning point in the history of modern Japan. However, despite the nearly unimaginable enormity of the problems created by the melting of the nuclear core and hydrogen explosion, the daily life in parts of Japan not directly affected by the earthquake, tsunami, and radiation outwardly return to its pre-3/11 ‘normal’ state without much delay. Given the urgency of the ongoing crisis, there is something strange and puzzling about this speedy return of apparent normalcy. (30)

In the narrative, the effects of the “incident” seem to have been effectively absorbed into daily life, normalized even in areas directly exposed. What also goes without being questioned in the narrative is the presence of the anthropomorphized bear. Featuring an animal character in her narrative, Kawakami is able to expose how the nuclear disaster not only has effects on humans but also on the nonhuman as well. While Hayashi focuses on the atomic bombing’s effects on the earth, Kawakami turns her attention to the effects of the nuclear meltdown on animals.

Not only humans but also domestic, wild, and livestock animals suffered after the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster. While it was mandatory for humans to evacuate, animals affected by radioactive elements were left “without the slightest hope for survival” and “died a horrendous death by starvation and dehydration” (Suga 176-177). Many works published after 3/11 that feature animal characters confront moral questions about the relationship between humans and nonhumans, specifically, how to care for animals during times of crisis (Haga 35). The character of the bear in Kawakami’s “God Bless You, 2011” compels readers to rethink this relationship.

In the narrative, the narrator finds the bear strange, remarking that he “certainly seemed to be an old-fashioned type of bear” (par. 4). The bear performs many formal customs that people do not practice nor often see anymore, making the bear both familiar to the narrator, as these customs are not totally forgotten, but also strange, since there seems to be some distance between these customs and the lived present of the narrator. The bear, moreover, is extremely accommodating and attentive to the needs of the narrator. Walking on the hot asphalt road barefoot, the bear seems to express no discomfort and is only concerned about the narrator. During their stroll, the bear prepares the food they share in their picnic, and offers to sing a lullaby for the narrator to help her sleep. We can surmise that, to be accepted by the narrator and by human society, the bear must perform these formal rituals and must be exceptionally generous and considerate toward humans.

The care the bear performs for the narrator, however, is generally unreciprocated. She even admits her own ignorance about the type of bear he is: “I couldn’t tell if he was an Asiatic black bear, a brown bear, or a Malayan sub bear” (par. 5). The two men wearing protective suits that the narrator and the bear encounter during their stroll, moreover, evidently expressed contempt toward the bear because of the bear’s capacity to supposedly “handle” radioactive materials. It is worth noting that in the 1994 version, the bear and the narrator encounter a child who “yanked the bear’s fur and kicked his legs” (par. 17). The bear, though surprised, says, “young people don’t mean any harm... human beings are all sorts, but children have no real malice” (par. 18, 20). In the 2011 version, there is “envy” and scorn, but the bear, being very forgiving, says that they must not have known that he is, in actuality, not resistant toward the effects of radioactive materials

The bear and the humans in the story epitomize the connection between humans and nonhumans: the narrator, specifically, views their relationship as “flimsy” (par. 4), which is how we humans generally view our relationship with animals or nonhuman entities. This opposition between human and nonhuman gains conceptual strength in connection with other categories of domination discussed in the previous section, where “nature” is associated with women, colonized subjects, and animals considered “lesser form[s] of humanity lacking the full measure of rationality or culture” (Plumwood, *Feminism*, 4). The bear, however, insists that their relationship is founded on a “karmic bond” (par. 7) established through the kind gesture of the narrator’s distant relative toward the bear when the “incident” or the nuclear meltdown occurred. This allusion to Buddhism is insightful in understanding the ideal bond between humans and nonhumans as “Buddhism’s

foundational commitment,” which is to express “compassion for all sentient beings”—covering both human and nonhuman entities (Whyte & Cuomo 241). This compassion is embodied by the bear, who is generous to all his neighbors and is extremely attentive to the narrator. From this interconnection between human and nonhuman entities, we can easily vouch for cooperation, mutuality, and love—the ideal positive emotions we should supposedly bring into human and nonhuman relationships that Mies and Shiva advocate for. But there are more interesting questions that Kawakami’s work asks, especially about the relationship between humans and nonhuman entities, and more crucially about anthropomorphism and one of its negative connotations.

We feel empathetic toward the bear in Kawakami’s short story because of the “humane” qualities and actions that the bear performs. The story seems to suggest that because of this, we should become more concerned with the welfare of animals, and by extension, the welfare of nature. A question arises though from this conclusion: Do we only extend consideration when animals, like the bear in the story, manifest anthropological qualities? Karen Warren and many other ecofeminists and environmentalists argue that we must reveal the interconnection between human and nonhuman entities, as the analysis of Hayashi’s work shows—with the narrator realizing the deeper connection between herself, New Mexico, and Japan, and the common aggressor, the U.S.—and the interdependence of humans and nonhuman entities, as Kawakami’s work suggests. However, we should also recognize and respect essential differences in the situation we find ourselves in with these nonhuman entities, as well as differences between our own nature, for us to make appropriate moral judgments.

Relating this point to Kawakami’s story, she portrays the bear as human, but she also suggests essential differences between the bear and humans: “The bear was studying the water also. But was he seeing the same things I was? Perhaps the world beneath the water was different when seen through the eyes of a bear” (par. 26). These lines call attention to differing perspectives, which makes us realize that the story itself and the portrayal of the bear within the narrative is constructed from the point of view of someone human. We must acknowledge that, beyond the textual construction of bears and nonhuman entities in literature, they live as real sentient beings who we are not fully capable of understanding. The real, radical duty is being able to care about and care for all nonhuman entities as agents deserving of moral consideration, regardless of and because of these essential and irreparable differences. In this way, care ethics forwards an alternative view of the relationship between humans and nonhumans.

## Works Cited

- Bhowmik, Davinder L. "Temporal Discontinuity in the Atomic Bomb Fiction of Hayashi Kyoko." *Oe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, edited by Stephen Synder and Philip Gabriel. University of Hawai'i Press, 1999, pp. 58-88.
- DiNitto, Rachel. "Writing Human Disaster: Hayashi Kyōko, Ishimure Michiko, and Kawakami Hiromi." *Handbook of Modern and Contemporary Japanese Women Writers*, edited by Rebecca Copeland. Amsterdam University Press, 2023, pp. 327-340.
- . "Hiroshima Encore: Return of the Hibakusha." *Fukushima Fiction: The Literary Landscape of Japan's Triple Disaster*. University of Hawai'i Press, 2019, pp. 89-120.
- Vakoch, Douglas, editor. *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism*. Routledge, 2023.
- Freiner, Nicole. "Mobilizing Mothers: The Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Catastrophe and Environmental Activism in Japan." *ASIANetwork Exchange: A Journal for Asian Studies in the Liberal Arts*, vol. 21, no. 1, 2013, pp. 27-41. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.16995/ane.37>.
- Gaard, Greta. *Critical Ecofeminism*. Lexington Books, 2017.
- . "Women, Water, Energy: An Ecofeminist Approach." *Organization and Environment*, vol. 14, no. 2, 2001, pp. 157-172, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26161568>.
- Haga, Koichi. *The Earth Writers: The Great Earthquake and the Novel in Post-3/11 Japan*. Lexington Books, 2019.
- Hayashi, Kyōko. "Dear Friend." Translated by Kyōko Selden. *Review of Japanese Culture and Society*, vol. 11/12, 1999-2000, pp. 100-106. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42800185>.
- . "Echoes." Translated by Margaret Mitsutani. *Mānoa*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1-10. JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4229914>.
- . "Ritual of Death." Translated by Kyoko Selden. *Nuke Rebuke: Writers & Artists Against Nuclear Energy & Weapons*, edited by Morty Sklar. Spirits That Move Us Press, 1984.

—. “From Trinity to Trinity.” Translated by Kyoko Selden. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 6, no. 5, 2008, pp. 1-29, <https://apjff.org/hayashi-kyoko/2758/article>.

—. “Masks of Whatchamacallit: A Nagasaki Tale.” Translated by Kyoko Selden. *Asia-Pacific Journal*, vol. 3, issue 12, 2005. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1557466005003670>.

Ho-Chi, Beata Kubiak. “When Your Neighbor Is a Bear, your Fiance – a Dog, and Your Lover – a Tuna. About Human-Nonhuman Encounters in the Works of Kawakami Hiromi, Shōno Yoriko and Tawada Yōko. A Critical Posthuman Perspective.” *Analecta Nipponica: Journal of Polish Association for Japanese Studies*, no. 8, 2018, pp. 83-96.

Karan, Pradyumna P. “Postwar Environmental Changes in Japan.” *Education about Asia*, vol. 15, no. 3, 2010, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/ea/archives/postwar-environmental-changes-in-japan/>.

Kawakami, Hiromi. “God Bless You, 2011,” “Afterword,” and “God Bless You.” Translated by Ted Goosen and Motoyuki Shibata. *Granta*, March 20, 2012, <https://granta.com/god-bless-you-2011/>.

Mies, Maria, and Vandana Shiva. *Ecofeminism*. Second Edition. Foreword by Ariel Salleh. Zed Books, 2014.

Murphy, Patrick. “Ecofeminism and Literature.” *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism*, edited by Douglas A. Vakoch. Routledge, 2023, pp. 1-14.

Morita, Keitaro. “Summarizing the Ecofeminist Debate in Japan in the 1980s: Five Points of Contention Emerged in the Aoki-Ueno Debate.” *Journal of Asian Women’s Studies*, vol. 30, no. 2, 2024, <https://www.kfaw.or.jp/en/publication/journal-of-asian-womens-studie/vol-30-2october-2024.html>.

Ōe, Kenzaburō. “History Repeats.” *The New Yorker*, March 21, 2011, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2011/03/28/history-repeats>.

Onabe, Tomoko. “Viable Plants, Infertile Soil: The Rejection of Ecofeminism in Japan in the 1980s.” *人間文化研究*, no. 10, 2019, pp. 107-130.

- Plumwood, Val. "Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments." *Women and Philosophy* 64, issue 1, 1986, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00048402.1986.9755430>.
- . *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. Routledge, 1993.
- Quio, Mina and Matthew C. Strecher. "Minding the Gap in Kawakami Hiromi." *Into the Fantastical Spaces of Contemporary Japanese Literature*, edited by Mina Qiao. Lexington Books, 2022, pp. 163-187.
- Phillips, Mary and Nick Rumens, editors. *Contemporary Perspectives on Ecofeminism*. Routledge, 2015.
- Shan, Lianying. "Women and Colonies: Shanghai and Manchuria in the Autobiographical Writings of Hayashi Kyōko, Sawachi Hisae, and Miyao Tomiko." *Handbook of Modern and Contemporary Japanese Women Writers*, edited by Rebecca Copeland. Amsterdam University Press, 2023, pp. 294-308.
- Suga, Keijiro. "Invisible Waves: On Some Japanese Artists after March 11, 2011." *Ecocriticism in Japan*, edited by Hisaaki Wake, Keijiro Suga, and Yuki Masami. Lexington Books, 2018, pp. 173-187.
- Warren, Karen. "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism." *Environmental Ethics*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1990, pp. 125-146.
- Whyte, Kyle Powys and Chris Cuomo. "Ethics of Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies." *The Oxford Handbook of Environmental Ethics*, edited by Stephen Gardiner and Allen Thompson. Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 234-247.
- Wöhr, Ulrike. "Ecology: Feminist Contentious Surrounding 'Women's Logic,' and Women's Complicity." *Handbook of Feminisms in Japan*, edited by Andrea Germer and Ulrike Wöhr. Routledge, 2025, pp. 53-61.

—. “Gender and citizenship in the anti-nuclear power movement in 1970s Japan.” *Gender, Nation, and State in Modern Japan*, edited by Andrea Germer, Vera Mackie, and Ulrike Wohr. Routledge, 2014, pp. 230-254.

—. “From Hiroshima to Fukushima: Gender in Nuclear and Anti-Nuclear Politics.” *Japan’s 3/11 Disaster as Seen from Hiroshima: A Multidisciplinary Approach*. Soeisha/Sanseido Shoten, 2013, pp. 203-233.

Yoneyama, Lisa. *Hiroshima Traces: Time, Space, and the Dialectics of Memory*. University of California Press, 1999.

Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. “Nuclear Disaster and Bubbles.” *Planetary Atmospheres and Urban Society After Fukushima*, edited by Christophe Thouny and Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, pp. 29-50.