

Japan Diaries: A Sampler of English Genres

著者	Karn Lawrence
journal or publication title	IREE Journal
volume	2
page range	1-42
year	2019-03-15
URL	http://id.nii.ac.jp/1114/00006669/



Japan Diaries: A Sampler of English Genres

© Lawrence Karn

Abstract

This paper may be considered as an informal survey of English creative writing genres. It presents five stories of Tokyo as a demonstration of some of the examples of form and genre in English literary writing. These are: 1.) short-form fragment reverie; 2.) creative nonfiction first-person memoir; 3.) the blend of personal narrative with fantasy fiction in the postmodern lyrical genre; 4.) science fiction; and 5.) a work—in the flash fiction genre—as a mini-comedy.

Commentary preceding each work gives continuity between the examples. Writer's Notes furnish contexts for the five creative works. The overall aim is that these stories will each present a different and unique picture of Tokyo; and that, together and in the order in which they appear, this sampler of literary works provides a diorama of Tokyo life and illustrates the practical and useful function of form and genre in English literary writing.

Keywords: *creative nonfiction, personal narrative, science fiction, postmodern lyrical genre, fantasy writing, flash fiction, form and genre, literary analysis, postmodern ambiguity*

Part 1: Introduction

“Tell a story. Express a viewpoint. Share your ideas. Include yourself.” That’s what I advise my students to do when they ask me about writing essays and journals and reports. Of course, the mechanics—introduction, body, and conclusion—are given as the performance space for their linguistic or literary expeditions. The structure and process are well-known rubrics. Likewise, this paper tells a story—which might be thought of as a

story about telling stories—in exploring how genre, how the type of writing and the form it takes, the structure in which the story is told, may be used to communicate the relationship of emotions and ideas to events.

Some happenings and experiences may be of personal introspection and reminiscence. *Fuji Abides*, the first selection, is an example of the Fragment short form Alan Ziegler (2014) includes in his list of short prose types. I put *Fuji Abides* in a sub-genre of short forms I term Reverie; it is a daydream recollection—the included photographic prompt evokes a feeling of Mt. Fuji appearing to float above layers of grey at its base—of my musings on Fuji.

In the creative nonfiction genre, the second selection, *Earthquake Diary* uses the personal narrative nonfiction memoir form. *Earthquake Diary* demonstrates the combination of historic event and personal narrative. This style is used to provide documentary accuracy and the added benefit that emotional involvement brings to what otherwise might be a tedious and depressing record of details and statistics.

The third selection, *Too Much Light and Not Enough Fish*, mixes personal narrative with fiction in the postmodern lyrical genre. Dream and reality both blend and bend. Lee Gutkind (2012) says that, “scene writing is true storytelling. A scene is an incident, an experience, a happening that the writer captures as cinematically as possible” (Loc. 233) and *Too Much Light and Not Enough Fish* takes Gutkind’s dictum to heart. While I may contend that *Not Enough Fish* resembles Gutkind’s “hybrid form of moviemaking called BOTS—based on a true story” (Loc. 632), the pure fantasy elements place it outside his limits for creative nonfiction.

Perpetual Life on the Carousel of Desire, the fourth selection in this sampler, is in the science fiction genre. Structurally, *Perpetual Life* appears to be the first two chapters of a book. My intention was that either chapter might be a stand-alone short story. The second chapter, *I am One Hundred and Twenty Years Old*, was written first. I later wrote the first chapter, *I Wasn’t Always One Hundred and Twenty*, to frame the action of chapter two in a wider context. I added the epigraph from *Frankenstein* to alert the reader that themes common to moral philosophy would be explored.

The last selection, *Friction Fiction Flash-Tokyo Style*, is a 344-word flash fiction tale. In *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction*, Tarah L. Masih (2009) says that, “a flash is simply a story in miniature, a work of art carved on a grain of rice—something of import to the artist or writer that is confined and reduced, either by design or outcome, into a small square space using the structural devices of prose line and paragraph form with the purpose of creating an intense, emotional impact” (Loc. 164). In my *Friction Fiction Flash-Tokyo Style*, the structural elements noted above—introduction, body, and conclusion—are present; and the focus is on the action. Masih references “Nathan Leslie (p. 7), who posits that ‘flash fiction is *about* ambiguity” (Loc. 421). I read that statement and immediately made the marginal notation, *so then, my Tokyo flash fiction will be a comedy of ambiguity.*

Part 2: Stories of Tokyo as Examples of Form and Genre in English Literary Writing

2.1 Short-form Fragment Reverie

Commentary:

This work is intended as a musing reminiscence; as such, it emulates a stream-of-consciousness progression in which thoughts are formed and words replaced as the work progresses. In effect, the work is edited as it is being written and, like memory, its accuracy is tentative. The aim is to convey a mood and, in this respect, the short form and flash fiction genres are similar. The distinction I make between the former and the latter is that the latter, flash fiction, has a greater degree of immediacy and is, as its moniker states, fiction. I chose *Fuji Abides* as the first in this series of genre samples because it is the metaphorical calm before the storm; its tranquility sets the scene for *Earthquake Diary* and the content of *Fuji Abides* is nonfiction.

Fuji Abides

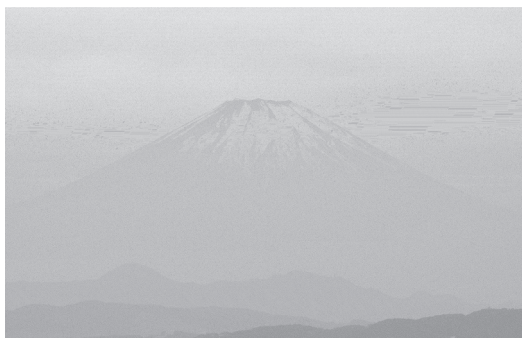
She is Japan. She is a symbol and an icon so famous that the contradictions only enhance her cachet. Swiss may long/ yearn/ resolve/ to go to/ happily go to Lake Geneva yearly or at every opportunity. The Japanese/ There is, conversely, a well-respected Japanese adage/ observation/ commonplace/ sage saying that to climb Fuji once is a noble accomplishment; to climb Fuji twice is considered to be—with the spirit of a pun fully intended—the *height* of foolishness.

The other well-known and readily acknowledged contradiction in Fiji's incomparable beauty is that she is only beautiful from a distance. Her pinnacle has long-since/ Eons ago she pulsed with volcanic flux, ebullient/ convulsed with ebullient fiery liquid lava. At once a female opening into and a male thrusting up from the liquid molten core of the Earth/ planet, Fuji embodies the opposites that engaged to birth planetary formation. Pulsing, quivering and oozing with the fiery liquids of volcanic eruption, she formed landscape that sculpted imagination.

I have savored her naked beauty only six or seven times—always from a distance, each time on a different occasion of sharing. First, with my travel companion of 15 years, we crossed the Mouth of Hell—a valley spewing gouts of noxious yellow smoke—and peered into the sulfur mine of Fuji's foothills. Our cable car crested the valley and Fuji emerged from clouds, her snow-capped summit stark and sharp against the azure winter sky. Springtime brought the visit of our friends and their children. We viewed Fuji while traversing Lake Asahi on a replica pirate ship. My companion departed, my nephew visited and two young Japanese women joined us for one part of our Fuji adventure; a gaggle of senior citizens invited us to join them at another point during the day. Later that summer, a high school buddy who'd found success in Hollywood—a millionaire world-traveler and adventurer—spent the day with me and we lunched on “thousand-year old black eggs” (eggs boiled in the sulfurous waters of the springs surrounding Fuji). When autumn colors swept over the Hakone area, its defiant leaves

rippled against the embrace of the strengthening winds and my new romantic partner strengthened her embrace. She whispered, “I will always be at your side.”

Only Fuji has abided. There’s a saying that Tokyo dwellers are blessed with being able to look over the Kanto Plain and see Fuji from anywhere in the city. It is Fuji that sees Tokyo, saw the time before Tokyo, and will remain whether Tokyo prospers or perishes. I acknowledge Fuji will endure all. Do I touch the timeless? No, the timeless touches me.



Mt. Fuji as seen from Enoshima Island

Writer’s Notes:

The sentiment, in the phrase “the timeless touches me”, may be pointing to the foolishness of self-centeredness. Or, it may be pointing out our naturally subjective position. We are the centers of our own universes and everything radiates outward from our perceptions of the external world. This sentiment was the guiding principle in the next genre sample, *Earthquake Diary*.

2.2 Personal Narrative Creative Nonfiction Memoir

Commentary:

The last sentence of *Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods* (Karn, 2016) flash nonfiction photo essay is, “Until the earthquake.” The final

photograph in *Tokyo Tropes* shows the Shinjuku district, where my first-person narrative creative nonfiction work, titled *Earthquake Diary*, begins. This item recounts my experiences in Japan during the 2011 great earthquake.

All events and details of this account are true.

Earthquake Diary

Doors came alive.

They burst open, slammed shut. Floors, walls, ceilings groaned—the building was a boat straining its lines, ripping its moorings.

Yoichi declared, “This is it, the big one. We’re going to die.”

Metal bookcases screeched, gnashing metal teeth. The next shock wave hit.

Our building creaked and shuddered like a pine tree’s bow about to be broken off. Girders convulsed within concrete, steel reinforcing rods flexed. Flooring slabs, drywall and ceiling tiles buckled.

Pung! Tempered glass panes swung into the room ... and snapped back—*thwack!*—until the next time they would break free of their magnetic claws. Like a boat in the trough between waves, our building was momentarily calm.

“Yes, Yoichi, one day we’ll die. I’m just not planning for it to be today.”

From our vantage point in a 16th floor office tower in Tokyo’s skyscraper district, the largest city in the world shimmered in the clear mid-afternoon light. Columns of concrete, some stretching 60 stories high and with 10,000 people in them, windows glinting like the scales of a transfixed cobra glistening in the full noon market square, stirred menacingly. It was around a quarter to three on Friday, March 11, 2011 and the largest recorded earthquake to have hit Japan was just beginning.

Our building swayed again. The shock waves were getting stronger.

A decade earlier I captained a small boat in the Bahamas. The tubby craft served as shuttle for guests visiting the yoga resort where I was doing

a six-month stint as seasonal staff. The breadth of its beam endowed it with some steadiness at the expense of maneuverability. Its relatively flat bottom, however, rendered it less stable than the building we were riding in. If the building were a boat, I'd say it was showing only a few degrees of roll and not much pitch. Japan's newer office towers were built to accommodate that sort of side to side rolling motion. It was the up and down pitching that shook buildings off their foundations. I was curious about how the buildings around us were doing.

Another and harsher lurch of the building brought a scream from Jennifer, who was sitting at one of the desks across from me. An office chair on wheels crashed into the wall of the south side of our office. On the west side of the office, behind Yoichi and me, the shelves heaved their contents into the narrow space that separated our chair backs from their bulk.

"Those bookcases will crush you! Get out of there!" implored Jennifer.

"I think they're bolted to the wall," I said.

From his desk beside me, Yoichi added, "We better hope so."

"You guys also better hope that wall holds. Or at least get under your desks."

I thought, *I'm not going to die cowering under my desk*. Standing up, I said, "I'm going to see what's happening around us." Upright, the sensation of being aboard a large craft on a choppy sea was much more pronounced. The open concept office and my lower center of gravity while seated had combined to create a visual and kinesthetic illusion that disguised the extent of the room's movement. In front of me, a cluster of coworkers sat in a circle on the floor. Others were taking Jennifer's advice and finding shelter under their desks. My desk drawers slid open and shut in motion with the rocking. Holding onto my desktop, I pushed in the drawers and turned the key to lock them in place in an effort to "get my sea legs" for the 50-foot walk across the office.

The north and east sides of our office were practically floor-to-ceiling glass. Nothing structural obstructed the corner view, either. Windowpanes met and only a half-inch bead of silicone plastic weather sealant held them in

place at the northeast corner. Hinge-mounted sheets of tempered glass, that swung freely suspended from each window frame, would prevent injury from the façade glazing shattering if the floors collapsed.

I walked to the window. Another wave hit and the heavy slab of glass sprung out at me.

Alone, in 2001, at an abandoned wharf around the Nassau Harbor container port, I practiced close-quarter maneuvering the shuttle before having any guests in my charge. The three-ton vessel—more like a floating mini-van with benches for six to eight passengers than a shore launch—was as unwieldy to dock as it was to sail. On a still day in this sheltered bay, the boat’s overhanging wooden roof narrowly failed to crush my head against an adjacent pier. A tiny ripple, barely enough to cause the mirror-smooth turquoise Bahamian waters to twinkle, was amplified by the shallow keel. I sensed the proximity of the roof overhang and bowed my head as the craft’s superstructure smacked the dock’s elevated deck.

The building jolted and a whoosh of air, like a subway train exiting a tunnel, shot up at me. I jumped back a hair’s breadth from the bone-crushing impact of the slab of tempered-glass, hinged at the top, which had suddenly burst free. With a *twack!* a moment later, it snapped back down into place. Yoichi came over to me.

“You trying to be some kind of daredevil or something?”

“No. They’re the real daredevils,” I replied, and pointed to construction workers on the skyscraper being built across the street. Concrete had been recently laid on the uppermost floor; it was dry, but the forms were still in place. A grid work of reinforcing rods was in position awaiting the next batch of concrete; a crane with a bucket for delivering the mixture was jutting up above the structure. A dozen or so workers were grasping the reinforcing-rods. From above, it looked as if they had been frozen in the act of climbing a giant screen.

Our building trembled and Tokyo shook, reeling with what was

happening. As Tokyo quivered, the crew on the building across the street knew exactly what was happening. No doubt, they were recalling how they'd been tasked with erecting a structure strong enough to withstand "the worst" and that their lives now depended on it living up to that standard.

Something else also appeared to be happening.

"I know they're holding onto the building to stop from being shaken off, but doesn't it look like they're holding the building to stop the building from shaking?"

Yoichi half smiled. "Maybe to stop Tokyo from shaking?"

"And it's working!" Indeed, as we stood looking at the workers below desperately clutching what had been the height of their building achievement up to that point, gazing out over Ome Kaido one stop west of Shinjuku Station on the Marunouchi Line, and over the 1,300 square miles of Tokyo, the earthquake tapered off. Even if all was not still, the frequency, intensity, and duration of the aftershocks diminished.

The magnitude-nine part of the 2011 Tohoku earthquake, also dubbed the Great East Japan Earthquake and the 3.11 Earthquake, had lasted six minutes. Its force had moved a landmass the size of California, Japan's main island of Honshu, eight feet to the east and shifted the Earth on its axis by approximately seven inches. The speed of Earth's rotation increased, which measurably shortened the length of an Earth day. In low Earth orbit, the European Space Agency's Gravity Field and Steady-State Ocean Circulation Explorer (GOCE) satellite detected sound waves generated by the earthquake.

Meanwhile, back on Earth, the office was a mess. Shelving behind Yoichi and me was rumbled, but standing. As with all the other staff, we set about restoring order. Putting disgorged contents of the bookcases back in place felt like it was somehow stabilizing the building. *Now that the quake is over the problem has passed*, I wanted to feel. People from other departments visited and a great deal of sorting out took place. In some ways, it was like cleaning up after a wild party. Everyone pitched in and there was a sense of purpose, that we were doing something to help and that we could bring this

situation under control.

Yoichi called his wife and two children in Yokohama, technically a southern suburb of Metropolitan Tokyo, and they were safe. Jennifer had only herself to worry about, but feared her apartment was a shambles. I called Satoko. She was in no danger and at her office trying to comfort those around her.

Staff in the marketing department pulled television sets from their office, set them on desks around other parts of the 16th floor, and small clusters of coworkers from each of the departments gathered together to hear the latest reports. Every new piece of information—that the quake had ruptured a gas line that set off a fire in Tokyo that was now under control or that Tokyo Tower had vibrated so much the antennae got bent and was otherwise fine—was greeted like one more tidbit of information to share in witnessing this historical event. Then, about twenty minutes after the earthquake, a greater disaster began.

I jumped onto the dock and said, “I’ve got the mooring rope and I’m tying us off. You cut the engine and let the boat drift in.” Part of my role in captaining the yoga resort’s boat was to train another operator. The engine was crucial for steering and could even help in casting off. Landing required more patience and care.

“I’ll just move us up a bit,” replied my well-meaning trainee as he activated the throttle. The rope in my hand instantly snapped taut around my wrist and began dragging me toward the horn cleat the rope was looped around. My brain screamed and fast-forwarded: *can’t win tug-of-war with three-ton boat, hook tears off right hand, move!* Desperately struggling, I freed most of my hand in time. I was lucky. Only the end on my longest finger was crushed, snapped, and broken off. There was no pain, only numbness.

“Hey, come to the television! Something is happening on the coast!” Everyone huddled around and horrific scenes appeared on the screen. The tsunami was beginning.

Kamaishi was the first coastal town to be hit, at about 3:15 p.m. Ofunato was hit around 3:20 p.m. Minamisanriku was hit a minute later. Rikuzentakata was hit at 3:22 p.m. Kesenuma was the fifth town to be hit, at 3:28 p.m. About 40 minutes after the earthquake, Kesenuma was under 36 feet of water. Tagajo was the sixth town to be hit, about 3:59 p.m. Powerful tsunami waves with peaks of up to 133 feet swept over Miyako city and travelled as far as six miles inland in the Sendai region. Even if the 16-foot high tsunami walls of Japan's coastal villages had been twice as high they would have made no difference.

The televisions assaulted us with images of relentless destruction. Later, media outlets might edit out parts that would be too disturbing to replay. Live reportage had no way to anticipate the level of carnage they were transmitting.

"Ooooh! Were their arms torn off? Or were those things snapping just boards and branches breaking all around them?" A coworker buried her face in her hands.

"They were probably sticks and boards and the people were knocked unconscious before they were drowned, so there was no time for them to suffer," I replied, trying to believe myself.

Do I remember feeling nothing or merely feel that I remember not feeling? You remember the pressure of a dentist's drill after your mouth has been anesthetized. There is no pain, only numbness.

Imagine a bulldozer the size of the horizon and with as much energy as the USA consumes in a year coming at you at 400 miles an hour, imagine watching people torn limb from limb and bodies and body parts that were alive instants before being tossed in the air before being crushed by boards and tree trunks, and watching houses and buildings torn apart and thrown onto cars and trucks containing people trying to escape.

The violence was obscene. I was watching it happen, but it wasn't happening to me. Truly, I did feel numb. I remember feeling practically nothing and wondering, *am I like a machine? Why am I not crying or screaming?* Why did I detach and imagine I was just an observer? I looked

around me to see what my colleagues were doing. Some were shaking their heads back and forth in disbelief or denial. Others looked away and then looked back only to look away again. Still others sat motionless, frozen in shock or numbed by sensory overload. I must have done all three because I'm doing them now, as I write these words.

By around 4:30 p.m. many people had drifted away from the televisions to see what they could do in their immediate vicinity. Emotional exhaustion was, perhaps, transforming our thoughts to those of practical action.

"Let's find out how much damage we've sustained," I suggested, and Yoichi and I set off to explore.

As earlier crashes had evidenced, metal bookcases in the office entranceway had shifted and shimmied to expel most of their contents. Yoichi and I stepped over heaps of books and articles to access the short hallway leading to the four elevators. Cracks in some places were half an inch wide at the bottom, tapering to almost hairline at the top.

"This proves how much side to side shaking there was."

"Tell me something I don't know," replied Yoichi.

An expanse of windows on the south side looked onto Shinjuku and over toward the Tokyo Metropolitan Government buildings.

"Wow, everybody's on the streets."

"OK, let's see about joining them," I said, and headed toward the elevators on the north side. They were in emergency shutdown. I had expected as much. My plan was to use the adjacent stairwell. We grabbed whatever we could hold on a buckled fire door and wrested it free from its frame. Staircases were intact, but the surroundings had suffered. Vertical cracks, like bolts of lightning in reverse, split the drywall in numerous places.

"Let's also make sure people aren't trapped on other floors."

With whatever effort was needed, we opened the rest of the doors in our journey down the 32 flights of steps to the grand lobby of the 21-floor Nittochi Nishi-Shinjuku Building. Various archway-mounted earthquake-resistant walls had deployed as designed, descending to reinforce the

building's structural integrity. The lobby was desolate.

We stepped outside onto Ome Kaido. The street was full of life. It was after 5 p.m. with less than an hour of daylight remaining. Portions of sidewalk had been twisted up. Wedges of roadway thrust over and under curbs.

People around us exclaimed, "Wow, look at that!" and "can you believe it?" Equivalent Japanese phrases "*tzu goy!*" and "*honto des ka?*" echoed amongst the crowd. Everywhere, people clutched each other's hands, embraced and sought comfort.

Convenience stores seemed to be the only places open and we waited patiently in long queues to purchase things we might be able to share with others. I chose tofu in small plastic tubs, rice wrapped in seaweed, and tofu pockets stuffed with rice. Yoichi selected some crunchy snacks and we returned to the office.

"I'm not sure how I'll get back to my family in Yokohama. I bet trains are stopped. Busses probably won't be running either."

"Could be a long night, Yoichi. I hope you like tofu. And I bet you're not alone."

Back at the office, directors from the Education division had assembled a smorgasbord-style dinner in one the largest boardrooms. Concerns with the plight of tsunami-stricken east-coasters were on everyone's lips, but conversation quickly turned to arrangements for accommodating people's personal needs.

"I'll walk home," I offered. "My place is only a few hours across town, I'd only be a drain on resources here, and my snoring would be unbearable for everyone." Supporting my decision, colleagues equipped me with a street map and a container of tofu. My real wish was to return to the apartment that had been normal when I'd left it earlier that day, as if reversing my steps might reverse the time.

There was a crescent moon that night. Only one third of the sphere would be illuminated. It was a waxing moon, to become full over the next nine days.

Doors hiss shut.

Hydraulic pistons press panels that seal the train car and, on the other side of the glass, I still hear her saying, “You go, you go. Be safe. I’ll join you if I need to.”

Radiation levels are rising in Tokyo and attempts to deal with the situation at the Fukushima nuclear power stations have been unsuccessful. My attempt to physically drag Satoko onto the train to Kyoto was also unsuccessful. She says the only time she’ll go is when the government orders the evacuation of Tokyo. Now the level is about two chest x-rays per hour and that’s considered to be acceptable. Of course, Satoko was adamant that a light-skinned, blue-eyed foreigner like me was genetically less able to tolerate radiation and wanted me to leave yesterday. It’s too much of a cliché to say this feels like a bad science fiction movie. Probably, years from now, events of March 11, 2011 in Japan truly will be made into such a movie.

For now, I’m on the Shinkansen—the “bullet train”—that’s, ironically enough, on its way to Hiroshima. I’ll get off at Kyoto and spend the next few days with Satoko’s sister, sister’s husband and their two children. They don’t speak English and my Japanese is less than basic, so that’s an adventure to look forward to.

This current “adventure” is one I wish I were now looking back on. Natural disasters—the 9.0 level earthquake on Friday the 11th and the more destructive tsunami that it caused—are more acceptable than the nightmare of six nuclear reactors and twenty years worth of stored fuel rods progressively becoming “fissionable” as seven days worth of containment efforts fail to lessen the problem. I’d have been willing to stay in Tokyo if the situation had simply stopped getting worse. Likewise, I feel guilty leaving Tokyo when there is no “clear and present danger” other than two chest x-rays per hour radiation exposure.

When I went into work yesterday the trains were slower and less frequent, but they were running. Other Tokyoites seemed grim, but were going about their usual business. More people seemed to have suitcases. Or, maybe I just took special notice of the ones with suitcases. On my way home

last night, the trains were much less crowded than usual. Now that I thought of it, that had been true in the morning.

At work today, there was a quieter than usual flow of the office routine, with everyone checking the most recent updates on the situation at the Fukushima nuclear facility. My boss took steps to agree to my request to leave Tokyo until the twenty-first, assuming the difficulties can be solved and the reactors can be brought back under control. The rest is speculation. I'd prefer to stick to first-hand observations.

Collecting my thoughts now, on the Shinkansen whistling its way away from Tokyo at 150 to 200 miles per hour, the waves of exhaustion seem to be washing over me as I struggle to stay awake to write this chronicle in the three hours it will take to reach Kyoto. But each whoosh of air as we pass through another mountain tunnel, each rattle of compression shock that buffets us as a Tokyo-bound train rockets past to create a 300 to 400 mile per hour wind differential, the gentle hiss from the heating units ... all lure me into a trance state where waking reality has been absorbed and rendered benign in a dream that transports me to a warm summer day with golden koi at Kinkakuji swimming luxuriously in the ponds surrounding Kyoto's golden temple. I see them now—shimmering golden carp undulating tails as delicate as silk scarves wafting in a breeze that is more gentle than a breeze—as my eyes creep shut.

Reports of radiation reaching as far as the coast of North America were part of the mix of fear and speculation.

“There’s no safe place, so I’m coming home.”

“Are you still nervous about radiation?”

“Yes, but Kyoto’s no more hazardous than Tokyo, so I may as well be comfortable.”

During my long weekend as a disaster refugee, I had camped overnight in the *chashitsu*—the formal tearoom used in the traditional *cha no yu* (tea ceremony)—at Satoko’s sister’s home. Her husband was a master of the ritual and one of his students was a Buddhist monk. The monk offered me

refuge at his temple. I stayed there my second and third Kyoto nights. Part of the understanding was that I would join all the events—which included a welcome reception Friday evening for a group of new devotees and attendance at all the religious ceremonies—and leave as soon as I no longer needed sanctuary. Two days of sleep, listening to sutras read in Japanese, and meditation with people who truly wanted to be there were all I needed. By Sunday, I was feeling somewhere between an imposter and a coward. That morning I gave a donation to the temple, paid office staff for my long distance calls, and packed up for my return to Tokyo.

“Why are you still in Japan? Embassies are recalling staff. Everyone who can leave is leaving. Radiation is the only thing that scares you,” said my friend in London, Canada.

“Yes, and now I have an excellent opportunity to face that phobia.”

“You’re nuts. You used to tell us microwave ovens were bad. Now you’re living in one.”

“I still think so, but I think it’s worse to be a chicken.”

“There’s a difference between cowardice and self-preservation. Come back to Canada.”

“Not now. Not this way. Maybe it’s more about self-respect than self-preservation, but I’m going back to Tokyo and staying in Japan.”

“You never did listen to us. Just promise me when you start to glow in the dark you’ll come back so we can use you as a night light.”

“Very funny and I love all of you back there, too. Now I better catch that train back home. Let’s see what news of fresh disasters there’ll be now that it’s nine days after the earthquake.”

During those nine days, the effects of the two additional results of the earthquake came more fully to light. Loss of life from the tsunami and deterioration in the stability of the Fukushima nuclear facility vied for importance as the most worrisome aftermath. Shortages of food and water and radiation contamination concerns, power outages and rolling blackouts, slowdowns in all services became a fact of life. Bottled water purchases were

limited to two two-liter bottles per person and supplies often ran out. Satoko and I each bought our allotment on our way home from work every night. Our commutes to work took twice as long, in train cars that looked like slender silvery tuna packed to the gills with penguins—salary men and office ladies wearing dark suits and white shirts or blouses—jammed together under dim lighting. In efforts to conserve energy, public lighting was half as bright. Some people told me they preferred Tokyo to not be ablaze with wasteful lighting.

Crime and vandalism did not take place. An attitude of Zen-like acquiescence, a spirit of calm enveloped the city and braced everyone for the challenges ahead. Eventually, authorities would confirm 15,887 deaths, 2,612 missing persons, and 6,150 people injured in the Great East Japan Earthquake. As a result of the tsunami disabling their cooling systems, three reactors were having level 7 meltdowns at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant complex. This displaced hundreds of thousands of residents from the evacuation zones. Fukushima is an ongoing concern. Across 20 regions, there were 1,148,067 buildings collapsed, half-collapsed, or damaged. World Bank estimates designate this as the most costly natural disaster in the history of the world.

Mine is a minor part in a major story and Satoko challenged my decision to tell it. Our debate went something like the following.

“Don’t write about the Japan earthquake. It’s gossip. Why do you want to tell the world, to tell anyone, stories of our troubles? So they can pity us? So they can criticize us? So they can say something even the stupidest school child knows; something anyone can look up on the Internet? Saying there were lessons about how in the future Japan will be more prepared for disaster and more mindful of the dangers of nuclear energy and pursue safer and more environmentally friendly alternatives like wind and solar power is such a cliché.”

“Maybe I want to talk about human suffering in individual terms, relating the body of humanity with one’s physical body? Or of reactive

depression or emotional exhaustion that serves as a psychological safeguard in the face of catastrophically unsettling events?”

“You’re not a psychiatrist. Don’t pretend.”

“It was a horrific experience I had never had before. It is an experience thousands of people will never have again.”

“You’re not their family. Don’t be phony by saying you mourn for them. Don’t trivialize it by turning it into some cheap morality tale. Don’t preach about how it teaches us to hold closer ones we love and have compassion for the world.”

“This event took place on a planetary scale. It’s a story about planetary ecology; the sea is reclaiming the land. I want to say something about helplessness leading to humility, about being torn apart on the inside even if the structure is still standing.”

“You are not a god. You can’t say such things. Don’t be so snobby.”

“This event had a big effect on Japan and on the world. It touched a lot of people. Its effects are still a problem. You must agree with that.”

“Of course. Everybody knows that. What is your purpose?”

“My goal is to share. I want to share my experience of what it was like for me during the earthquake.”

“Good. That’s enough. Maybe some people will find your writing to be interesting.”

Writer’s Notes:

All events and details of this account are true.

Earlier Published Work on the Great East Japan Earthquake:

Karn, Lawrence. (2012) “Hope from Despair: A Youthful Perspective on Japan’s 11 March 2011 Disaster,” in *Gengo Bunka no Shosou (Studies in Language and Culture)*, (eds) Underwood, 高野成彦, 羽井佐昭彦, 原田龍二, 松岡みさ子, Myskow, Wright, pages 22-36, Mediaisland, Tokyo, Japan. ISBN 978-4-904678-45-9

Reference Information:

Japan is the size of California or Georgia, or of North and South

Carolina and Virginia combined. <http://www.ifitweremyhome.com/compare/US/JP>

My workplace at the time:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeon_\(language_school\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeon_(language_school))

...down the 32 flights of steps to the grand lobby of the 21-floor Nittochi Nishi-Shinjuku Building. <http://office.jp/en/catalog/Nittochi+Nishi-Shinjuku+Building/37654/>

Building earthquake countermeasures and immense shock resistant doors:

During the Cold War, the USA and Canada established the North American Air Defense Command (NORAD) as a bi-national command. The main fortress was at Cheyenne Mountain in Colorado Springs. Another was in North Bay, Canada. My flesh crawled with revulsion when I saw the South Portal entrance blast doors of the North Bay facility. Here were similar rugged industrial devices.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_American_Aerospace_Defense_Command

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf5QxXdQu0M>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cKeXvG176mk>

<http://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/22-wingcanadian-forces-base-north-bay-recognized-by-norad-commander-gen-jacoby>

Earthquake-resistant walls in the Nittochi Nishi-Shinjuku Building had deployed as designed, sealing archways to reinforce the building's structural integrity. Even if the 16-foot high tsunami walls of Japan's coastal villages had been twice as high it would have made no difference. The lobby was desolate. Stepping out onto Ome Kaido, the street was thronging with people.

Tokyo as largest city:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_metropolitan_areas_by_population

<http://geography.about.com/od/urbaneconomicgeography/a/>

agglomerations.htm

<http://geography.about.com/od/urbaneconomicgeography/a/agglomerations2.htm>

Earthquake data:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2011_Tōhoku_earthquake_and_tsunami

<http://www.livescience.com/39110-japan-2011-earthquake-tsunami-facts.html>

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/GOCE>

http://www.esa.int/Our_Activities/Observing_the_Earth/GOCE

Chronology from a production by BBC Channel 4:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oArd_9uZOnE

Ongoing problem at Fukushima:

<http://www.world-nuclear.org/info/Safety-and-Security/Safety-of-Plants/Fukushima-Accident/>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fukushima_Daiichi_nuclear_disaster

2.3 Postmodern Lyrical

Commentary:

Past three a.m. and pondering the *Ambiguous Images of Japan* photo exhibition creative project, I was in dreams before realizing it. Snapping awake, I jotted the following sentences in my writer's notebook. *What strange dreams. One was about my nephew Jonathan; he had planted a toast bush. The shrub grew and flowered with slices of bread. Then, when the bread-flower ripened it became toast. It was perfectly browned by the sun and could be picked at breakfast time or whenever one wanted a toasted sandwich. And there was another dream. It was something about melon sushi.* This entry inspired a work of fantasy, except for the parts that are based on reality and personal experience, set in Tokyo with semi-autobiographical elements.

Too Much Light and Not Enough Fish

Studio lights make it impossible to see the audience. Table, chairs, a refrigerator, an unplumbed kitchen countertop are white phosphorus

blazing on the closed side of the set. Sudden wind in an autumn forest rustles dry leaves. Applause. It's abundant and, this being Japan, as gentle as rain on lotus palms.

Television host Hiroko Moriguchi gestures at me as if I'm a prop in a magic show. "Tzu goyl!" she gushes and the audience becomes a mountain stream burbling kinetic and effervescent over volcanic rock.

Is she complimenting me on my suit?

She holds up a cantaloupe. Perfectly spherical, surface rough as vascular tissue on the underside of an oak leaf, ocher with veins the tawny hue of lacquered bamboo; she is presenting a newly discovered planet. It orbits from the end of her outstretched arm. Her other arm motions toward me again.

Leaves crackle. The murmur recedes. Is she comparing my head to the melon? Is my haircut too short at the sides?

She glides to the countertop. There's a white cutting board, easy to miss, and a white ceramic French style chef's knife with its blade three times the handle length; why didn't I notice that before? I strive to vanquish similarities between this melon and mine as she halves the fruit to reveal orange flesh as succulent as fleshy orange Salmon.

Six more slices section the cantaloupe into grinning arcs, each of which she arranges on a gleaming white platter and conducts to the refrigerator god, who shall prove to be fecund.

Moriguchi, in one fluid movement, opens the door with her left hand, thrusts the platter in her right into the frigid colorless obelisk, and midwives a freshly birthed and marvelously decorated platter of melon sushi, which she withdraws with her left. She holds forth the miracle and raises her right hand above her head, an Olympian saluting her country in half the balletic *allongé* pose.

The forest erupts. It's typhoon rain on lotus leaves.

She bids me eat.

I do.

Then...

Then again, maybe she is complimenting me on my suit.

I'd never buy such a suit myself, but my ballet-dancer Osaka friend insists I just try it on. The fact that the cost translated to between three and five thousand United States dollars seems immaterial. I'm not going to buy it. Just trying it on is, I figure, like getting ten or twenty bucks use out of it for free. Why not?

Unfortunately, she decided it was the perfect attire for me to accompany her to the Bolshoi Ballet when she returned to Tokyo for their appearance later that month. She contacted the tailor and had him use the measurements he'd taken to fashion the suit and deliver it to me. It rankled my male pride.

"My angry little duck, accept the fact you are poor and don't sexist pig against my chance for you to have one suit I'm not ashamed to be seen with you in. You have lived in North America so much of your life that you know not so much about all of the other worlds."

"There's nothing wrong with being an English teacher."

"Nothing wrong with having a nice suit, either."

"I have a suit."

"Garbage."

"I didn't say it was a nice suit, but it's still good."

"Good to give to the garbage. Keep fighting me and you will feel worse to lose. Agree now and save time."

"Look, I agreed to go to the ballet with you. I didn't think you'd tell me what to wear."

"You can't go naked."

"I know."

"Do you know your suit is worse than naked?"

"What does that mean?"

"It means if you are ashamed to go naked you must be more ashamed to wear your garbage old suit. Pride is ugly and you can be a handsome man in a nice suit. Now throw away your ugly part and stop fighting me."

“I think it means I won’t win this one.”

“You will never be winner dressing in ugly old garbage suits. You won a new suit. Enjoy your prize with me at the ballet.”

So, I met my friend, who was dressed in a kimono costing upwards of ten thousand US dollars, and I was wearing that suit, which was so finely made and absurdly understated it may as well have been part of the upholstery of the NHK Japan Studio Hall performance space.

Pre-performance, a spotlight finds us. Sudden wind in an autumn forest rustles dry leaves. Applause. It’s abundant and, this being Japan, as gentle as rain on lotus palms.

People wave. I wave back.

“Who are you greeting?”

“Everybody, I guess.”

“Guess better; they wave to the princess, not you.”

“Princess? The performance hasn’t started yet.”

“Yes it has. Princess Masako is sitting beside you a few seats over and I’m very glad she can see you are wearing a nice suit.”

I’m wearing that suit now. Different flints spark my visions. They ignite and increasingly flicker into focus.

The focus, a locus of luminosity—incandescence emanating from a dais—is enveloped in a more diffuse light. A speech ends. Sudden wind in an autumn forest rustles dry leaves. Applause. It’s ample and, this being Japan, as gentle as rain on lotus palms.

I’m in the diffuse light, which then resolves into clarity. Morning mist dissipates over mountain plateaus. Fragments of rainbow refract prisms onto a milk horizon. No. They’re silk or satin clad walls. Overhead are suns too blue. Crystal? Yes, chandeliers. Sculpted carpets ape natural terrain, but the uneven surface has a physically disorienting effect beneath meticulously overborne opulence.

My right hand is heavier than my left. I hold a gleaming white plate.

Gleaming white plates in hand, queued for one of the buffet stations, we chat about the quality of light over the gardens. From the Hotel New Otani's sumptuous banquet room, we savor the beauty of the ten-acre grounds and sense their 400-year history. Last rays of the afternoon's brilliance guild cherry trees. Their gold drips into the reflecting pools on the terraces. Comparing the light to sunset over Lake Geneva, he reminisces on his diplomatic duties there; he wants to settle in Geneva, his wife forbids it. He presents his card and I read he's been Prime Minister of Japan. As with other honorifics, like President, Ambassador, PhD or MD, the title remains even when the bearer isn't performing its associated duties.

"The least I can do after your hardship, Prime Minister, is to let you stand ahead of me in line," I jest.

He laughs, but doesn't decline. We move toward the food. Hints of béchamel tantalize my appetite. No, it's hollandaise—butter, egg yolk, lemon and a touch of sauvignon—as the perfect compliment to the sea bass on offer. Scrumptious. I can taste it, and since olfaction is actual chemical communication, I taste it now. Its flavor evokes subtle notes of saffron in a harmony playing with what sauce is when it achieves nirvana. We edge toward the serving chef in anticipation. The Prime Minister gets the last fish.

Kindly giving me a task while I watch him eat, he asks me to explain what I'm doing for the United Nations Association of Japan.

"Just now it's a small piece on our relationship with China. I see similarities in history, culture, and language as well as ongoing interests in regional stability and trade relations. But really, the situation might be better presented in poetry or song."

He laughs and thanks me for our amusing conversation.

I write the poem.

Japan and China as a Fish and a Bird

A koi,

appearing bigger than others,

*ascends from the depths of the pond
 an arm's length from the water's edge.
 Orange as the last rays of the setting sun
 and first flash of a struck match,
 its scales glisten with late afternoon sunlight.*

*The golden carp basks—
 its body flexing back and forth
 in movements matching the water's mild
 motion—and surveys its surroundings
 through bulbous imperious eyes
 in deliberate and regal contemplation.*

*Indifferent undulations of its delicate tail
 are a silk scarf billowing in a light breeze
 sending out fine ripples in concentric rings
 across the mirrored pool.*

*A Mandarin duck
 approaches
 and the wake from its body
 points at the tranquil koi.*

*Apex meets circle.
 The pattern breaks.
 The fish sinks below.
 The bird glides above.*

*The koi, as coy as Japan,
 retires to depths of introspection.
 The Mandarin duck, iridescent,
 displays bright colors*

*of China's glittering past;
and seeks its place
on the sleek surface of its world.*

Cantaloupe sushi; it may yet catch on.

Writer's Notes:

Yes, I really was in a program on NHK Japan National Television. In the actual appearance, I was teaching TV host Hiroko Moriguchi in a television show about internet lessons and new English learning methods. I did sit beside Princess Masako of Japan at the Bolshoi Ballet in the NHK Studio Hall. I did see the interaction between that koi and duck at the Golden Temple in Kyoto. Most story elements are true; their arrangement is a fabrication worked in a dream and reconstructed to the best of my recollection.

Other facts or details in this reality-based fiction can be checked below at the following internet addresses.

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hiroko_Moriguchi

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_ballet

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Masako,_Crown_Princess_of_Japan

The *Ambiguous Images of Japan Photography Show*, mentioned in the commentary above, analyzed results from 200 research subjects, survey data from Otsuma Women's University campus exhibition, October 19 to November 17, 2016. Human subjects research was approved by participating universities and conducted with UI&U Cincinnati Institutional Review Board Training Certification valid until March 23, 2019.

2.4 Science Fiction

Commentary:

Donna Haraway's *Cyborg Manifesto* is one of the inspirations for my gender and identity manipulating science fiction piece, entitled *Perpetual Life on the Carousel of Desire*. This item also exemplifies how my analysis of the

Reflections in the Carousel of Desire photograph from a Lacanian perspective (Karn, 2016) provided stimulus for me to envision a biomedical narrative occurring fifty years into the future. This is a near-future science fiction piece, set in 2048, in which identity formation, maintenance, and reformulation are considered within questions of immortality and genetic customization. These chapters expand on the ambiguity of all elements of identity by creating a future in which notions of race, age, gender, culture, nationality, religion, disability, longevity, bio-medical ethics, and science are all topics up for discussion.

Perpetual Life on the Carousel of Desire

“If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human mind”

(Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein*,
Loc. 587-88, Project Gutenberg Edition).

Chapter 1

I Wasn't Always One Hundred and Twenty

A voice.

“...seems to be coming out of it.”

“And there you are. I'd say 'good as new' except it should be 'better than new' just now. You're back in 2048. How does your new self feel, Dr. Iritani?”

“Better than my old self looked.”

Threads from my left wrist snake to the monitors. Fiber-optic cilia cascade toward bundling-wire harnesses. Congratulatory applause greets me as if I were a rabbit that had just pulled itself out of a hat. Dr. Muto, my assistant and former student, smiles with genuflection befitting the practiced diffidence of a magician's helper and turns toward the audience of

technicians and surgical residents.

“I see you’re all eager to commence the debriefing, but let’s give Dr. Iritani a moment to adjust before we gather data firsthand. We may also need to take a moment to adjust Dr. Iritani.”

Moments are all we have. The body learns, but the heart remembers. Why should humanity be forced to lie on the procrustean bed of genetic singularity? Singularity. The singularity. That phrase has the nuance of the rhapsody, doesn't it? It trembled on the horizon like the whisper of salvation, like the answer to questions we didn't know we had. The singularity: the future reality of human and machine confluence. Retrospectively, we know that future passed. It passed as we awaited its arrival. The guest of honor was quietly ushered into the dimmed anteroom to join with the other would-be celebrants anticipating the delight of the surprise party's commencement. Little by little, they comprehended how the party had already started. Heart pacers played the rhythm we danced toward the singularity. Incremental life expectancy improvements, not cyborg superhuman eruptions, made biomechanics into bioelectronics into biogenetics.

Good grief, had I just droned on like some badly channeled Delphic oracle spouting trite common knowledge? Muto smiles at me and turns to the audience.

“The process of post-enhancement wake-up is not unlike the dream residue state following normal mammalian sleep. At this stage Dr. Iritani may be imagining thoughts are being spoken in a more-or-less stream of consciousness fashion. This condition is usually of brief duration, although the first few utterances may be far less than concise. We may recall Wordsworth’s description from *Intimations of Immortality* that ‘trailing clouds of glory do we come from God’ and liken the poet’s understanding of eternity to an extraterrestrial telescope encountering quasars and making visible what was only electromagnetic. Those of you from psycho-neurology will, of course, appreciate a short period of affect lability—which we’ve good-naturedly termed affect lability—typically accompanies post-upgrade reanimation.”

Muto concluded. I was relieved my thoughts had been reverie rather than rant. Kaori Matsuda from the clonoprint unit raises her hand, biochip nail polish twinkling from the terminus of fingers as dexterous as those of a robotic ophthalmic assembler. “What about the inboard structurals? They should have integrated transparently.”

She’s correct. There was always immediate satisfaction from the 3-D printed tissues. They’d been grown outside the body, but seeded sampling its own functioning organs. I reply.

“Peripherals are the easiest part; biomechanics are precision carpentry compared to the diamond cutting involved in engram encoding and neural network partitioning. The sharper each bevel and more highly polished each surface the more finely will the diamond communicate and preserve its brilliance and clarity, but the better the chance each cut will refract an errant bundle of photons onto the adjacent facet. With diamond the substrate is identical to the exterior. A better analogy may come from the practice of artists painting over previous works on the same canvas. Still present, contiguous even if invisible, are entire earlier pictures. On flexible surfaces, the gesso may flake and bits of earlier paintings make their presence known.”

“Thank you for expounding on woodworking, gemstones, and fine art, but I want an assessment of the status of the platinum-titanium carbon fiber interface with your cloned smooth and striated musculature. On that, I’d prefer you to you eschew any reflections on Greek or Roman sculpture you might be contemplating gracing us with.”

“I’m leavened by your levity and moved to brevity. Thank you, Matsuda san. Those systems are completely viable. You should now have an on-demand nail-screen display any time you neural-request it. I just beta-waved it to you. And when I said ‘easiest part’ in my comments, I meant the most perfectly functioning. My compliments.”

A surgical resident asks, “Will that feed come from your left wrist control unit?”

“No, it’s a brain feed. The wrist’s a port. We’ll disconnect the backup

unit inputs and diagnostics and, like you, I'm entirely on internal power."

Another student asks, "Will we all have access to your systems?"

"As authorized by your research specialties and as-needed, yes."

Dr. Muto and other core scientists on either side of me have been disengaging setup devices. Muto advises, "We've steri-sealed contact points securely and you can produce enough of your own antibodies to block an epidemic. Now you'll be fine no matter what questions they throw at you."

"This will be fun and press conferences can also be learning experiences," I smile. "How about some of Matsuda san's brio, Muto san? Smiling can be infectious."

"So can muckraking, but I suppose you're ready. They're coming in now."

Clad in wearable recording devices, the journalists exuded pseudo military or quasi law enforcement aplomb. Their inquisitorial expressions and image-capture stability stance communicated a rectitude that extended well beyond their posture.

"This is Katai Kibishi from *Kitsune News*. Okay, Iritani unit or whatever you are, is the real Dr. Iritani in that box?"

"You mean the backup unit behind me?"

"Yes, your 'captured consciousness chamber' device. And how dare you presume to call yourself Dr. Iritani when you look nothing like him?"

"Mr. Kibishi, if you had suffered terribly disfiguring injuries you might look nothing like yourself, but you would still be you. And you might wish others to show you more kindness than you offer me."

"Don't try pushing those empathy and guilt buttons on me. You're anything but disfigured and you still haven't said what's in the box."

"You know what's there. We've used them for decades during brain surgery. School children call them heart-lung machines for the brain. You don't have to be a neurosurgeon to understand that concept. They maintain neural patterns to prevent memory loss. We used them to cure Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia. They preserved my neural patterns during this procedure. Next question, please."

“Chotto Taihen from *Obaka Shinbun*. So, when did you cease to be? When did you die to become reborn?”

“With respect, Ms. Taihen, I must question how pertinent it is to ask, ‘When did you cease to be?’ Isn’t the more relevant question, ‘When did you cease to be you?’ or ‘How much of you remains when the only part of you that has some degree of continuity is your memory of who you are?’ Let’s reverse that concern and ask, ‘If you lose your memory, is the continued presence of the body enough to constitute being?’”

“Your questions do not provide an answer.”

“Then imagine sleeping and waking up again. That’s what it feels like. Next?”

“Skoshi Chigaw with *Urusai Broadcasting*. Dr. Iritani, don’t you think you’re a modern vampire taking over one body and then the next?”

“Not really, Mr. Chigaw, although I do find your attempts to sensationalize quite charming and so I will say this; I inhabit a platform from which to pose questions and isn’t that truly the nature of all human existence?”

“Su-goy Mendoksai from the *Kurushi Journal* and I must challenge your last statement. How can you talk about what’s natural when there isn’t much of the natural you left?”

“It’s all me, Ms. Mendoksai, because I distinguish between what is natural and what is original. On the question of natural versus artificial, we may want to note that all we have constructed comes from nature and that the natural versus artificial distinction is an evaluative and judgmental position rather than a sensible experience. Or is someone who relies on a prosthetic limb somehow less human?”

“But what if the prosthetic limb is superior to normal?”

“What if it is? Should we be jealous? Or is it only acceptable to correct a crippling condition if it doesn’t improve the recipient beyond the norm? If we can replace what you had with something superior, it seems unethical to withhold the better outcome.”

“But if you extend this, doesn’t your fundamental humanity vanish?”

“Isn’t our fundamental humanity displayed in what we do?”

“You’re trying to recreate yourself as a god of longevity.”

“Longevity is relative. Our ancestors died in their twenties.”

“This is Yasashi Hito. Our *Science Daily* audience wants to know how it works.”

“DNA is active and reactive. We all know RNA orchestrates DNA; why shouldn’t the conductor give a live performance? It’s code and it’s language—not just a recording for playback but a mode of conversation where information is exchanged, debated, then stockpiled for later consideration or used more immediately for adaptive transformation.”

“How do you access the data in earlier selves?”

“Think about sitting down to meditate, Mr. Hito, but you keep remembering the neighbor’s dog that you played with as a child. Thinking about not thinking becomes as impossible as thinking of nothing. Memory—of your memories and other people’s memories—is selective and we may improve our ability to make choices.”

“And, with thanks to you all, we may choose this juncture to wrap up our question and answer session,” chimed Muto. Journalists jostled, suddenly ebullient.

“Is science your religion?”

“I would say *religion* is my religion if we understand *way of life* as the most accurate meaning of the term religion.”

“Then you’re against religions as we see them now.”

“Truly, I venerate them. Every religion is a major or minor masterpiece, filled with subtle details comprehensive enough to contain and explain the cosmos. They may start in fear, like the way every PhD course or similar journey of understanding begins, and guide us through humility toward a coming to terms with the core of our existence as the transcendence of our transience.”

“Aren’t you trying to cheat death?”

“Define death as a snag in the weave of life and we are merely smoothing its fabric, negotiating its waft and stitch count.”

“But you want a slope so smooth you can slide forever.”

“We all live in containers being endlessly recycled. Life is an acceptance of those limitations and restrictions. Life is also a challenge that explores potentials and possibilities and opportunities and, yes, to realize visions and expectations that strive to go beyond its limitations and restrictions.

Now I expect you all have your own explorations to resume and, with thanks for your candor, interest, and attention, I will leave you to do so.”

I arise to an unaccustomed altitude, savoring the slightly more scenic view for an instant before following Muto to my office.

“Am I an overworked cliché? Am I addicted to life?”

“It’s not always all about you, Aki. It’s about the research. Remember? And as far as addictions go, many are far worse.”

“Like what?”

“How about smoking?”

“Okay. Do we still have any of the cigarettes we used for alveoli imperviousness testing in the carcinogen reversal design stage?”

“I didn’t mean...”

“This will give Kaori san something to ponder on those high-tech fingertips of hers. And what are these?”

“Artifacts. Your host system used them during his corporeal sentience.”

“For overcoming mobility challenges? Impossible. They’re primitive. No indications of interface connectivity.”

“Karn thought they were fun.”

“Hmm. There’s a stylized ‘K2’ stitched onto the Achilles tendon opening. K2? Was there a second version of the Karn character that had these custom-built? One Karn should have been more than enough.”

“You tell me. You’re him. Just access the host memory cache to active.” Muto grimaced in mock-derisory pout. Usually pursed portending the probability of her posing a proposition challenging long-held scientific assumptions, lips yearning and taut as if her mouth were on the threshold of a kiss as she tantalized naked truth from the most recalcitrantly clothed raw data, her expression altered as she turned to me. She drew close. Closer.

“And, uh, try to keep your ‘photons’ and ‘flakes’ in order. You’re flakey enough already.”

“Right. Got it. Host memory to active mode. Just one Karn, but he’s talkative enough for two. They’re turn-of-the-century, 2015-vintage inline roller skates. Karn/ he/ I insisted on keeping them and planned to use them again.”

“And?”

“Time to test muscle memory, heart rate elevation, Krebs cycle and oxygen management. I’ll gear up on the patio between the cafeteria and nursing school, head south for Shiba Park down the side street, and light up on the first secluded bench I find.”

Chapter 2

I am One Hundred and Twenty Years Old

“Aren’t you worried that’s dangerous?”

“Smoking or roller blading?”

“What? Oh, are those what you’ve got on your feet? Retro. I just figured they were mag-lev mods.”

“No fields, just friction. They roll and make ground contact.”

“So, what are you; are you like an antique collector?”

“No, I bought them new quite a while ago. They’re originals. I’m not.”

“Ah, now I get it. Custom body, so why not give your nano-cleanse lungs a workout? By the way, how enhanced are you?”

“It depends where you look. Major organs—heart, lungs, liver, stomach and digestive system—are replacements. Mine, but clone-grown and DNA-tweaked to reweave some of the strands for extra support. Bold question, *by the way*. Does that lab coat make you feel like a doctor?”

“Ahh, well, um, sorry to be intrusive. My scholarly exuberance overpowered respect I must be more mindful to show. I’m a medical student at Jikei, a couple of blocks from here. We’re also Japan’s largest genetic selection superstore and top-of-the-line body upgrade boutique. Please

forgive my boldness.”

“*Daijobu desu*. I’m not offended, but some people might be. So, are you on your lunch break here in the park, Mr. ...?”

“Ito. My name is Hiroshi Ito, but please call me Hiro. *Hajimemashite*. *Dozo yoroshiku onegai shimasu*.”

“*Hajimemashite*. It’s a pleasure to meet you, too. I am Dr. Akira Iritani. I’m also glad we can enjoy Shiba Park on such a pleasant afternoon. I must now beg you to forgive my ‘formality reflex’ that too often spoils enjoyment of idiomatic English.

This view of Tokyo Tower; it always makes me smile to look at that perfect copy of the Eiffel Tower—an architectural clone, if you will. We liked the Paris original and I remember when we built our own in 1958. Another decade and it’ll be 100 years old.”

“You saw it being built?”

“Yes, Tokyo Tower, not the Eiffel. I’m not that old, you know. You may also know they filmed that James Bond movie here in 1967. *You Only Live Twice*.”

“I will only live twice?”

“*You Only Live Twice* is the movie name. I’m not sure how many times you’ll live, but I’d guess you’re in your early twenties of your first life and have many more miles to go before you sleep the big sleep. Oh, excuse my reference to Robert Frost and Raymond Chandler.”

“Thank you for putting my mind at ease and please excuse my ignorance about the work of Frost and Chandler. I guess they must have been famous sleep research pioneers. I’d like to hear more about their area of study, but I’m most curious about you. In 2011, Dr. Akira Iritani sequenced the woolly mammoth genome and said he’d clone one within the next decade.”

“Yes, I did and I did.”

“That’s you? You’re him?”

“Yes and yes.”

“Wait a minute. You are a black woman, right?”

“Yes. Skin shows the most wear, gets switched out many times—sometimes it’s routine maintenance, others just for fun. Black, Asian, Albino, Ainu—it doesn’t make any difference nowadays. As for gender, remember the joke about how actors and foreign cars used to suffer from a shortage of parts? Well, now that’s as outmoded for people as it is for cars.”

“Fun?”

“Yes, fun and world peace. Those ideas ought to go together. If everybody can be anybody the retrofits are irrelevant, right?”

“All right! I knew you were retro; now I know it’s as in *retrofit*. You also seem prototype. Like, how does the memory overlay work? Who else is in there with you?”

“Slow down, Hiro-*kun*. You know running virtual operating systems has been commonplace for half a century on computers. In my case, there’s the host system, Lawrence Karn, and the guest systems that include me in a container modeled after a former Miss Universe Japan. Each aspect of our characters creates its own memories.”

“You and Kong?”

“Think of a car made of corn and you’ll get his name, but that last sentence holds true for everyone. You remember things that never happened to you as if they did. Memory is imagination in action and even rumination on the illusion of invention is creative. Whether it’s me as Karn or as Akira Iritani or as the embodiment of Ariana Miyamoto, it’s me.”

“And how long have you been *you*?”

“How long does it take to skate from Jikei Medical University to Shiba Park?”

“That’s it?”

“Yes.”

“What’s your name?”

“I haven’t decided yet.”

“You’re beautiful.”

“Cool it, Hiro, you haven’t known me that long. In fact, I haven’t known me that long. Not long enough to decide my preferences. Besides, I’m five

times older than *you* and technically 15 minutes old as *me*. Wrap your noodle around that meatball.”

“I’m sorry, I don’t understand the expression.”

“Truthfully, neither do I. It must be a ‘Karnism’ or a shred of memory mishmash or maybe those two are the same. Anyway, I know he/ I enjoyed roller blading, so that was the first bio-kinesthetic shakedown after the wakeup. Patella calibration.”

“*Nan desu ka?*”

“What are they? Kneecaps. They get bio-kinesthetic data to my leg servos—carbon fiber muscular implants, biomechanical actuators, titanium here, diamond there—and there are a showcase of DNA hacks and splices that keep the whole movie running.”

“How about your nano-cleanse lungs?”

“Nanotech? It’s just a marketing name; microbes have made things for us since people used them to ferment grapes for wine and the same process to make the cheese to go with it. You could get a better look at what’s going on in my lungs by looking at the underside of those leaves instead of the front of my shirt. It’s a stomata alveoli DNA splice—same thing Iritani/ I did to reconfigure elephant DNA to match the mammoth sequence—that’s a straightforward hack between human structures and plant processes because neither species is extinct; plants filter air efficiently, so why not add that process? You said prototype and maybe you’re right as far as it goes. Think of it this way, each generation prototypes the next. I’m just speeding the process.”

“Wow, you are on a roll. Was that the long-talking Karn/ you memory? Will he tell me his part of you? Or do I ask you to describe the part of you that’s him?”

“His part started when he became an M.A. student in 1954 and received a letter from University Hospital along with his graduate scholarship. It invited him to be a sperm donor for their artificial insemination research. Eugenics was controversial then. Ask me later and I’ll tell you more. For now, just remember they’re all me. Karn may be in the host system, Iritani

may be in its core memory, but I'm the new kid in town—the Miyamoto version of the design—and I've got my own memories to make.”

Writer's Notes:

Glossery of Japanese words, approximate translations in Hepburn standardized Romaji

Katai Kibishi from *Kitsune News*

katai = hard or unyielding

kibishi = strict

kitsune = fox

Chotto Taihen from *Obaka Shinbun*

chotto = a little bit

taihen = difficult

obaka = stupid

shinbun = newspaper

Skochi Chigaw with *Urusai Broadcasting*

skoshi = somewhat

chigaw = different

urusai = noisy

Su-goy Mendoksai from the *Kurushi Journal*

su-goy = extremely

mendoksai = troublesome

kurushi = painful

Yasashi Hito

yasashi = gentle

hito = man

Wingfield-Hayes, Rupert. [interview with Ariana Miyamoto, in Miss Universe Japan bid], “The beauty contest winner making Japan look at itself” *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-32957610>

2.5 Flash Fiction

Commentary:

Trying to be helpful, I carried an older woman's suitcase up the stairs and onto the crowded platform at Shinjuku Station in central Tokyo. She thanked me and we parted ways. In my fascination with ambiguity in visual interactions, I began thinking of ambiguity in social interactions. What if my action had been misinterpreted?

Friction Fiction Flash-Tokyo Style

Three million people press through Tokyo's Shinjuku station daily, platforms busiest. White-gloved staff stuff passengers into clattering sardine tins. Seniors, school-uniformed kids, smartly dressed office ladies and salary-men jostle, each vying to be first; train departure melodies compete. Chaos is choreographed.

In her mid-eighties, in patterned kimono favored by oldsters *en route* to formal events, the woman in front struggles her suitcase to the first landing.

"I'll take your bag up to the platform," do, wait.

She shouts, "*Dorobō da!*" [Thief!], vanishes, reappears, policemen in tow. "*Asoko ni imasu! Akai shatsu!*" [There he is! In a red shirt!] Our eyes meet, boarding horn sounds, sea of commuters wash me into the getaway train.

Shin-okubo station police point, speak into walkie-talkies, alert counterparts at Takadanobaba. My shirt and car number must change before then. A gander waddling through goslings, I waggle to the next coach. Exiting demands unprecedented stealth. *Undershirt black, stealthy black, I'm stealth itself*, I imagine, crouching, unbuttoning, and removing my red shirt.

"*Chikan!* He tries groping of me! He is *chikan*; he is pervert!"

"No, no, no; I just need to take some clothes off."

"Yes, yes, yes! We catch you. Shame for you, pervert man!"

"I'm a nice man, not a pervert."

“Nice pervert man! Get away!”

“Shame! Shame! Shame!” begins, train stops; doors open, shames me to the platform. Takadanobaba, Waseda University’s station, thronging with students, station police barely noticing the crumpled shirt in my hand.

“*Chikan!*” cries the woman.

“*Dorobō!*” adds the officer, nodding, earphone at his head. Officers pursue. But students are legion, urge me on—a favorite marathon runner.

“Such fastness; *ganbatte!* [Do your best!]”

“You are high-energy man!”

“*Ganbatte*, sprinting man!”

Walkways become alleyways. Homeless gentlemen inhabit tidy dwellings, cardboard villages on railway lands. I collapse at a lean-to between fence and bushes.

“You are sports man come to my place. Much exercise. Healthful life. Sit.”

“Thank you. Please have this shirt.”

“You are kindness man. Okay, I have. Red is lucky. So kind strangers can be.”

“Yes,” I smile. “They can try to be so.”

Part 3. Conclusion

This article has presented five stories of Tokyo as a demonstration of form and genre in English literary writing. The main tenet of *Japan Diaries: A Sampler of English Genres* can be expressed in one sentence. Choose the medium that suits the message; use the form and genre that best communicate the meaning.

The individual works in *Japan Diaries* have sought to be informative, interesting, and entertaining to educators, students, and casual readers. The subject matter aspires to be stimulating and practically useful. It may encourage reflection and reverie on one’s own sense of place, as in *Fuji Abides*—in which one’s sense of personal history is examined against the

grandeur of nature. *Earthquake Diary* may effectively use the genre of personal memoir to communicate the historic significance of the Great Tokyo Earthquake of 2011. The blend of memory and dream in *Too Much Light and Not Enough Fish* could prompt readers to interrogate how they reconstruct their own memories and moods. *Perpetual Life on the Carousel of Desire* may allow us to consider our mortality in the context of questions in medical ethics. Finally, the *Friction Fiction Flash-Tokyo Style* humorous piece may provide us with a definition of our postmodern condition.

Postmodernism does not dispute the existence of objective reality; it stresses that we must take subjective impressions and assessments into account to determine which conclusions the fact situation seems to support. In the example of *Friction Fiction Flash-Tokyo Style*, the protagonist's actions—muttering something unintelligible to the listener and then taking her suitcase away—were consistent with an act of theft, of taking another person's property without her or his consent. And yet, the defining feature of theft, the unlawful intent, was absent and we know this proves that nothing criminal had happened. However, only we (and the protagonist himself) know that his intent was noble. The consequences of the central character's good intentions cascaded into a condition in which he was unwillingly pushed into escaping from a crime he did not commit. We know he only wanted to be kind and helpful.

In the end, we all try to be kind and helpful. The flash fiction character was misinterpreted at every step. His kindness was misjudged; he was innocent and yet forced to flee apprehension; he sought asylum with the homeless and was regarded as an overenthusiastic jogger. Ironically, only his final gesture, to conceal the evidence of his identity by giving away the red shirt, is misinterpreted as an act of kindness. The joke (or instructive insight, if we take the didactic message) is that all our intentions may be misinterpreted. Ambiguity, about actions and language, provides the ground for a variety of interpretations; and the awareness of our subjective impressions, and engagement in the process of assessment, nourishes critical thinking skills that are valuable at all levels of academic and everyday

life.

As for the thought-provoking and amusing aspects of the five works in *Japan Diaries*, I respectfully defer to your judgment and temperament in deciding the level of fascination and enjoyment you experience. I am advised at the conclusion of *Earthquake Diary*, “Maybe some people will find your writing to be interesting. Good. That’s enough.” I end this paper hopeful that you are one of the people for whom it is, and I thank you for your kind attention.

References

- Gutkind, Lee. (2012) *You Can't Make This Stuff Up: The Complete Guide to Writing Creative Nonfiction from Memoir to Literary Journalism and Everything in Between*. Philadelphia: Da Capo Press/Lifelong Books.
- Haraway, Donna. (1991) “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century,” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, New York; Routledge, pp.149-181.
- Karn, Lawrence. (2012) “Hope from Despair: A Youthful Perspective on Japan’s 11 March 2011 Disaster,” in *Gengo Bunka no Shosou (Studies in Language and Culture)*, Eds. Underwood, 高野成彦, 羽井佐昭彦, 原田龍二, 松岡みさ子, Myskow, Wright, pp. 22-36, Mediaisland, Tokyo, Japan. ISBN 978-4-904678-45-9
- (2016) “Tokyo Tropes in Nebulas and Neighborhoods: Five Locations from Eternity to Home in Tokyo,” a photo essay, in *Penumbra Interdisciplinary Journal of Critical and Creative Inquiry*, Vol 3, pp. 48-53, 2016.
- Popular Depictions of Love, Gender, and Identity: An Analysis of Reflections in the Carousel of Desire from a Lacanian Perspective*, presented at Union Institute & University at the University of Cincinnati campus, Ph.D. Conference, January 7, 2016.
- Masih, Tara L. (2009) Ed. *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Fiction*. Brookline: Rose Metal Press. Kindle Edition.
- McDowell, Gary L. and Rzicznek, F. Daniel. Eds. (2010) *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Prose Poetry*. Brookline: Rose Metal Press. Kindle Edition.
- Moore, Dinty W. Ed. (2012-09-24). *The Rose Metal Press Field Guide to Writing Flash Nonfiction: Advice and Essential Exercises from Respected Writers, Editors, and Teachers*. Rose Metal Press. Kindle Edition.
- Ziegler, Alan. Ed. (2014) *Short: An International Anthology of Five Centuries of Short-Short Stories, Prose Poems, Brief Essays, and Other Short Prose Forms*. New York: Persea Books. Kindle Edition.