

TRANSNATIONAL LITERATURE

Good Luck in the New Year

Kelly Quinn

I killed three fruit flies that were buzzing around the *mikan* oranges on the counter this morning, and in the garden there were slugs after yesterday's rain, so it is not looking much like Christmas here.

I was with Sachiko doing some shopping; she was looking for some tights for Mina. I have been warned in the past about staring too intently at the posters in the women's lingerie section, so I wandered over to men's underwear.

It is the Year of the Monkey in the Chinese zodiac, and the monkey's lucky colour is red. There was a display of bright red underwear: long johns, briefs and T-shirts. The wearer was promised good luck, and so on a whim I picked up a bright red cotton T-shirt.

This T-shirt is a work of craft. I would say 'art,' but that word is overused. The T-shirt was made in Japan by a company called Gunze, one of those companies that started by making silk kimonos in the mid-nineteenth century and now makes fibres for everything from socks to aerospace components.

The T-shirt is a thing of beauty. The cotton is thick and soft and the stitching tight. It fits snugly, and you can tell that the collar won't stretch and be droopy after the first wash. Compared to the paper-thin, slightly itchy, five-for-ten-dollar Hanes T-shirts made in Bangladesh that I usually wear, eight dollars for one T-shirt seems expensive, but wearing it makes me happy; a deep, satisfying calm comes when I pull it on.

With the problems facing the world today – terrorism, economic uncertainty, the plight of refugees and Donald Trump – we must find our joy where we can and recognise what is truly good in the world, even if it is just a T-shirt.

Kelly Quinn was born in Agana, Guam and attended university and graduate school in the United States. He has taught English in Asia for over twenty years and currently teaches at Nagoya Institute of Technology. He is the author of Japanese History You Should Know.

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