Our Toxic Transpacific: Hydro-Colonialism, Nuclearization, and Radioactive Identities in Post-Fukushima Literature

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Within the various subfields of literary study, the ocean is one of the most ubiquitous metaphors. From the shoreline, Herman Melville—whose *Moby Dick* has proven to be an urtext for oceanic discourse—views the ocean as a monolith, the "yawning gulf" that "rolled on as it rolled five thousand years ago" (580). Meanwhile, Melville's similarly canonized contemporary, Walt Whitman, dips his toes into the shallows and establishes a network between "the fishes that swim, the rocks, the motion of the waves, the ships with men in them" (327). Others resist this humanizing impulse, seeking to divorce the ocean from its metaphorical contexts, focusing instead on the material conditions, histories, and lived realities of oceanic and adjacent life-forms. Often invoked in terms of an assemblage or a network, the ocean serves as a conduit for scholars seeking to contextualize the history of Black cultures and communities, such as Christina Sharpe and Paul Gilroy, who write from the wake of transatlantic slave ships, undertaking the important work of remembrance.[1] Complicating all of these varied and divergent aesthetic approaches are the dual realities of climate change and colonialism, of which there may be no clearer intersection than the 2011 Tohoku earthquake and subsequent fallout at the Fukushima nuclear power plant, collectively known as the 3/11 disaster.

The trauma of that event—in which more than 15,000 people died with thousands more missing—prompts the poetry of Lee Ann Roripaugh, who contributes her own metaphor to the bank of literary oceanic symbolism: the tsunami itself, personified as a female speaker. Rather than name the tsunami, Roripaugh employs imagery of spillage to denote both the societal imprisonment

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of women and the global impact of the tsunami's visibility. The speaker implores us to call her both the "scalded splash / of tea jarred from / a broken cup's cracked glaze" and the "*meme* / infecting your screen … the *malware* / gone viral" (2019, 1, 3). Far from the background setting of humanity's anthropogenic struggle, Roripaugh's sea is itself a kind of metahuman hybrid: water, woman, and web-based all at once.

Although other nuclear disasters, such as Chernobyl and Three Mile Island, have been critically imbricated with the cold war politics of U.S. and Soviet relations, the approach to 3/11 and the Fukushima emergency has been submerged in the global politics of climate change and environmental justice.[2] This shift is due in large part to Fukushima's oceanic immersion and its global witnessing. The nuclear fallout at the plant has been blamed for at least one cancer-related casualty and the leakage of a sizable quantity of radionuclides—iodine, cesium, and tellurium—into the waters of what was once a prominent commercial fishing region (Lochbaum et al. 2014, 156). Meanwhile, cellphone and closed-circuit cameras captured the disaster in real time, allowing viewers from all over the world to see cars lifted and entire towns swept away. We can understand this event as a nuclear incursion into time, in which, in the words of Karen Barad, "nuclear time, decay time, dead time, atomic clock time, doomsday clock time—a superposition of dispersed times cut together-apart—swirl[ing] around with the radioactivity" (2017, G107). Roripaugh's writing as well as the videos, novels, and other artifacts that emerged after 3/11 prompt us to consider a new metaphorical interpretation of the ocean: that of a swirling irradiated storm that is itself a toxifying force upon humans caught in its path.

Even as this essay risks contributing to an already exhaustive catalog of oceanic metaphors, such revisioning is important in holding settler colonial discourses accountable. By focusing on Roripaugh's depictions of the aftermath of 3/11, I hope to, in the words of Stacy Alaimo, "evoke evolutionary kinship across vast temporal and oceanic expanses," while also avoiding the pitfall of these studies being "dismissed as ancient history if they do not open out onto the present moment, acknowledging how human bodies participate in global networks of harm" (2014, 189). The Tohoku earthquake, tsunami, and subsequent leakage of radiation into waters connect such global networks as coastal nuclearization, Pacific island colonial occupation, and transpacific militarization. In much the same way as "9/11 literature" emerges as a field to discuss the global impacts and sociopolitical ramifications of a singular day of terrorism, literature written in response to the 3/11 disaster invokes wide-ranging issues important to human and nonhuman survivors, including narratives of trauma, postnational geographies, and posthuman ontologies.

In thus engaging material ecocritical, transpacific, and decolonial scholarship, this essay employs a reading practice indebted to Isabel Hofmeyr's (2019) "hydro-colonial" neologism.[3] In pursuit of new routes in oceanic studies, hydro-colonialism refers to the ongoing occupation, instrumentalization, and resource extraction of the seas, waters, and oceans by national or corporate

powers. This hegemonic striation of the ocean takes the form of military bases, fishing conglomerates, penal colonies, aircraft carriers, plastic landmasses, and nuclear power plants. In reading hydro-colonialism in works of literature, I hope to contribute to the recent "oceanic turn" toward a "tidalectic consciousness"—a concept coined by Caribbean poet Kamau Brathwaite and mobilized by Elizabeth DeLoughrey to explore "the complex and shifting entanglement between sea and land, diaspora and indigeneity, routes and roots" (2007, 2). Hydro-colonial critique builds upon postcolonial and material ecocriticism while shifting focus away from terra-centric and historicist models of colonialism. This pivot creates space for the materiality of the sea to emerge as an agential force while simultaneously buoying postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives to the surface.

Read in this light, 3/11 literature takes on a global significance. In addition to lamenting the staggering loss of life, the novels and poems produced post-Fukushima view the nuclearization of the Pacific as a continuation of Japanese and American colonization. These texts show how governmental oversight and failure to proactively respond to climate change–related disaster resulted in environmental injustice—where the fallout of 3/11 had specific consequences for poor Japanese and Japanese women, whose bodies have been metaphorically and literally altered. This essay navigates these hydro-colonial channels while placing them within the broader backdrops of material ecocriticism and globalization studies.[4] I begin by forging connections between hydro-colonial nuclearization and global racial capitalism as depicted in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* (2013), which has emerged as the preeminent "American" novel in response to 3/11.[5] For Ozeki, both racist and deracializing aspects of hydro-colonialism are mitigated through entanglements with nonhuman animals and objects. I establish this theoretical groundwork before examining poems from Roripaugh's 2019 collection *Tsunami vs. The Fukushima 50*, demonstrating how imagery of irradiation and toxicity present a posthuman response to the 3/11 disaster, global hydro-colonialism, and the ongoing climate crisis.

Colonial Catfish: Folkloric Rectifications to Hydro-Colonialism in Ruth Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being*

Ozeki's *A Tale for the Time Being* begins when Ruth, a novelist living on the coast of British Columbia, discovers a Japanese lunch box washed ashore, carried across the Pacific by the drift of oceanic gyres. Inside the box rests the diary of Naoko Yasutani, a Japanese schoolgirl living in Tokyo. Ozeki's narrative leaps between these dual protagonists, crossing expanses of space and time in the process.[6] As Ruth reads the journal, more of Nao's story is revealed: how she set out to write the life story of her great-grandmother Jiko, a Buddhist nun, but was distracted by rampant bullying at school and her father's depression and suicidal ideation. Meanwhile, the act of reading Nao's journal raises questions for Ruth about the nature of writing, memory, and time. These dual narratives take place before and after the Tohoku earthquake with the disaster serving as a nondiegetic event that occurs outside the time of the novel, yet the disaster

haunts the lives of both Ruth and Nao. For Ruth, the act of reading Nao's diary is an act of recovery, in which she is able to bring both narratives to a satisfying resolution even as the aftermath of the 3/11 disaster is ongoing with some bodies never discovered and the long-term effects of the fallout remaining to be seen.

Recent years have seen a number of analyses of the novel through the critical lenses of Asian American literature, Pacific Rim scholarship, and transpacific discourse. In *Ocean Passages*, Erin Suzuki describes how "transpacific" has become shorthand for studies of Asian and Asian American diaspora while the broad geographical swath cut by Pacific Rim studies can enact the same homogenizing of Indigenous persons and those from smaller Pacific islands of which the term "Asian American" itself is emblematic. Suzuki praises Ozeki for rendering the Pacific Ocean as a site of "submerged and belated histories that have been ignored or occluded by the capital-driven structures of contemporary transpacific politics, economy and policy" (2021, 1). This reading coalesces with Michelle Huang's (2017), which focuses on Ozeki's depiction of the 80,000 tons of floating plastic called the Great Pacific garbage patch, which lies at the center of the very gyres that prompt the transpacific journey of Nao's diary.[7] In imbricating environmental devastation, cultural erasure, a disproportionate impact upon raced bodies, and capitalist extraction, these existing readings of *A Tale for the Time Being* underscore the human and material costs of globalization. However, they do not explicitly address 3/11 or the symbolism of irradiation as a hydro-colonial by-product.[8]

To extend these readings of the novel further into the hydro-colonial requires that we take up the challenge laid down by Laura Winkiel, who demands that we account for the way predominantly Western governments and corporations "have polluted the seas with heavy metals, nuclear waste, and plastics, with the result that human bodies, along with marine and terrestrial animals, carry profound, often life-threatening, *toxic* burdens that are assumed unevenly across the globe" (2019, 1 emphasis mine). Toxicity is one way in which the impact of hydro-colonial nuclearization can literally be measured, whether it be in clicks of a Geiger counter or gallons of irradiated water. This radioactivity is not often visible on the surface level but internalized within the bodies of humans living adjacent to and dependent upon water or in the apparatus of nation-states willing to expose communities to danger for economic gain. After adopting and instilling pronuclear rhetoric and policies following the conclusion of World War II, the Japanese government set up the pieces of the 3/11 disaster, and climate change, accelerated in part by the rise in global emissions brought on by global corporations, knocked them down. The reality of the 3/11 aftermath is that its ecological dangers have been downplayed by the Japanese nation-state, which supplants arguments of health, environment, and public safety with that of a "postpolitical" need for global political standing and power.[9]

In response to this sociopolitical and quantifiable understanding of toxicity, Ozeki layers contemporary nuclear irradiation on top of the history of colonization

of Miyabi prefecture. Ruth recounts how, as the floodwaters devastated Japan in real time, she watched interviews of fathers who lost their families and was "mesmerized" by the footage of devastation (112). These images were followed up with a shift in coverage away from the human toll toward the national economy. Ruth explains how "occasionally an article would appear in the *New York Times* about TEPCO's mismanagement of the meltdown or the government's failure to respond and protect its citizens," but for the most part, these were replaced by "gloomy reports about the cost of Japan's cascading disasters, deemed to be the most expensive in history" (114–15). For Ruth, this predictable response proves the hubris of the Japanese government, which ignored local knowledge and built a nuclear power plant at a location where stone markers more than six centuries old warned "Do not build your homes below this point" (114).

In the text, the words from this stone marker are centered and bolded, offset from the rest of the type. Later, Ruth employs the same type formatting when detailing a second sign, this one from Fukushima's pronuclear propaganda machine. This sign reads "Nuclear power is energy for a brighter future! The correct understanding of nuclear power leads to a better life!" (141). Ozeki offers Japan's push for nuclear energy as a framework for understanding the tragic events of the tripartite 3/11 disaster. Crucially, Ruth positions this pronuclear agenda as a contemporary colonialist action. She explains how the land that makes up Miyagi prefecture is stolen, one of the "last pieces of tribal land to be taken from the indigenous Emishi, descendants of the Jōmon people, who had lived there from prehistoric times until they were defeated by the Japanese Imperial Army in the eighth century" (141). In keeping with the transpacific framework of the novel's two narrators, Ozeki juxtaposes Japanese imperialism in one chapter with the landscape of British Columbia, "scattered with the names of famous Spanish mass murderers," and Ruth's own island, nicknamed the "Island of the Dead" due to "the smallpox epidemic of 1862 that killed off most of the indigenous Coast Salish population" (141-42). The toxicity of the Fukushima plant drifts across the Pacific as regional terrestrial forms of colonialism are connected by hydro-colonial nuclear radiation. Ruth obsesses over the inner workings of the plant, pouring over the official update logs that documented the pumps, gears, and valves that made up the nuclear cooling fail-safes that, for days, shuttled and cycled water into exposed reactor cores. The machinery of hydro-colonial hegemony dumps gallons of irradiated water into the Pacific as it simultaneously hides the harm it is inflicting upon the life-forms, human and nonhuman, most directly impacted in the region.

For Ozeki, dealing with a hydro-colonial disaster requires understanding history and responding to it by reframing its violence within established mythology. For example, Ruth compares the 3/11 disaster and aftermath to the legends of the *jishin namazu*, the "earthquake catfish," and the *yonaoshi namazu*, or "World-Rectifying Catfish" (198). Ozeki shows how there are already well-established symbols in Japanese culture that acknowledge this connection between natural disasters and wealth inequality. Rather than immediately shifting the post-

3/11 discussion to the economic repercussions that Japan now faces, Ozeki reminds readers of an animist tradition that links environmental destruction with governmental abuses of power. The working class viewed the *yonaoshi namazu* as a benevolent force that targeted the rich during "a period characterized by a weak, ineffective government and a powerful business class, as well as extreme and anomalous weather patterns, crop failures, famine, hoarding, urban riots, and mass religious pilgrimages, which often ended in mob violence" (199). Like the sign warning settlers not to build houses beyond a certain point, the animist catfish represent forms of traditional knowledge that were overlooked by the Japanese nation-state to aggressively pursue nuclear power in hopes of improving the country's global reach at the risk of endangering its own people.

Although Ruth's mind turns to traditional knowledge and myth, Nao and her grandmother, Jiko, respond to hydro-colonial militarization by gaining *supapawas*. This term is an accented form of the word "superpower," spoken by Nao's grandmother and Buddhist nun Jiko, who suggests that Nao must develop her own original *supapawa* to achieve self-actualization. Unlike conventional superheroes who gain their abilities through gamma radiation, cosmic rays, or toxified arachnids, Jiko asserts that Nao can gain her ability through the Buddhist practice of sitting *zazen*, a meditative act that "if you do it every day, your mind will wake up and you will develop your *SUPAPAWA*" (182). In deriving power through Buddhist meditation rather than through radiation, Jiko reclaims the idea of "power" from Cold War–era nuclear propaganda and the notion of "global superpower," a label the United States owns and that the Japanese nation-state aspires toward. Both Jiko and Nao use their *supapawas* to cope with the lingering trauma of Haruki #1, Jiko's son and Nao's ancestor, a kamikaze fighter pilot who was tormented by his actions during World War II.

Given the complex interrelations between governments, corporations, communities, and individuals, Ozeki's novel illustrates how the Pacific Ocean is more than a body of water, but a hydro-colonial expanse. However, Ozeki reminds her readers that it is not insurmountable, and can be crossed through relationships with nonhuman animacies. Ozeki textually represents this crossing through *kotodama*, "spirits that live inside a word and give it power" (98). These *kotodama* appear in the text as the words "fish" and "crow" anthropomorphized into their shapes (98, 349). *Kotodama* represent crossings from the symbolic to the real and from the literal to the figurative, and they also, importantly, allow for a crossing between Nao and Ruth's narratives. The crow that appears in Ruth's narrative is a particular type of species, nonendemic to British Columbia—a "jungle crow" that was "part of the drift" (55). The crow is similar to other trans-Pacific species mentioned by Ozeki, including oysters and jellyfish, that are buffeted across the sea by currents. However, the crow also reappears as a nonhuman force that seemingly bridges the two narratives by allowing Ruth to witness a surreal meeting between Nao and Haruki #1—a meeting that defies the established logic of the novel (349). Ozeki accompanies this resolution with additional nonhuman imagery: a storm that eventually leads to Ruth and

her husband finding their missing cat, Pesto. Although the interjection of these nonhuman forces does not undo the damage of hydro-colonial militarization in the Pacific, it does allow for its human characters to "set up the conditions for a different outcome" (376) that reestablishes relationships with past knowledge and establishes a more ethical relationship between persons, governments, and environments.

Although Ozeki's novel depicts personal trauma and devastation, it also confronts global disasters of nuclear waste, climate change, and militarism. In this way, the novel is a tale for the present time and also one that looks toward the past while anticipating its impact upon an environmentally fraught future. Hydro-colonial powers restrict water access, devastate oceanic and adjacent life, claim ownership of space that is not their own, militarize pelagic areas, and engage in transpacific trade. These are all acts in which the Japanese government took part, and this is the context behind the decision to build the Fukushima Daichi Nuclear Power Plant in 1967. As Ozeki demonstrates through catfish lore, *supapawas*, and *kotodama*, the Pacific is the site both of Japan's and America's most devastating colonial offenses and where these damages are addressed and reimagined. Having identified the hydro-colonial forms of 3/11, I turn now to the poetry of Lee Ann Roripaugh, who suggests the irradiated water and toxic topsoil of Fukushima is best symbolized through a poetics of bodily augmentation that sees its speakers cross boundaries of the human and nonhuman.

Radioactive Layering and Poetics of Disintegration in Lee Ann Roripaugh's *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50*

A Tale for the Time Being mobilizes regional animism to counteract the irradiated consequences of the Fukushima disaster, challenging its readers to reimagine their relationship with a colonized Pacific. Ozeki's dual narratives provide a rim from which to view the transpacific ramifications of nuclear drift. Ultimately, the novel is a recuperative project in which the acts of writing and reading work to ameliorate the personal traumas of its characters. The novel is also a work of speculative fiction, in which temporal distortions allow divergent narratives to coalesce, and digital technology emerges as a response to the information age—when disasters are viewed in real time and personal anonymity is no longer possible.[10] The speculative mode also informs Lee Ann Roripaugh's *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50*, a collection of poems that offers a conclusive indictment of oceanic colonization and a thoughtful contemplation on its toxic impact upon racialized and gendered bodies.

Although the tri-disasters of 3/11 occur outside Ozeki's narrative, in Roripaugh's poetry, the earthquake, tsunami, and fail-safe breakdown perpetually approach, recede, and destroy. The poems themselves display haphazard forms, one mimicking the format of a glossary while the others are driven by Roripaugh's powerful elemental imagery and skillful anaphora. Roripaugh's speakers are diverse: Many of the poems are written from the perspective of the tsunami herself, personified as a woman, and others embody male workers who made

up the "Fukushima 50," people who stayed behind to pump seawater into the reactors (51). Still others adopt the personas of irradiated Marvel superheroes and *kaiju*, from the Hulk to Mothra. In mixing Japanese and American popular culture, Roripaugh forms a bridge between pronuclear hydro-colonialism on both sides of the Pacific. As do Japanese American contemporaries David Mura, Kimiko Hahn, and Garrett Hongo, Roripaugh approaches the complex maneuverings of her mixed-race Asian American identity by relating it to place: places that are under perpetual threat of environmental deterioration. Through embodying the personas of irradiated figures and animating the tsunami itself, Roripaugh confronts the legacy of hydro-colonial nuclearization and its racialized violence against Japanese and Japanese American communities.

Roripaugh saturates her poetry with toxic imagery and irradiated symbols, including garbage bags of nuclear waste, blemished bodies, radioactive ocean water, and sloughed topsoil. However, these poems illustrate how toxicity is not only a by-product of hydro-colonial overreach, but, as in the case of her speakers, a bodily augmentation. Exposure to the toxic makes the subject *more than* and presents an opportunity to react and reassert agency in the face of overwhelming environmental disaster. This understanding of toxicity is best expressed through what Mel Y. Chen terms a "toxic" bond. Chen's re-signification of the usually negative term "toxicity" as a force that "propels, not repels" is essential in an irradiated world of *kaiju* and nuclear fallout (2011, 281). Chen's assertion that toxic animacy can be an "alternative, or complement to existing biopolitical and recent queer-theoretical debates about life and death" helps us forge a new paradigm for analyzing how oceanic disasters impact Asian bodies (265). Through analyzing the animacy of lead and the panic toward Chinese people and China following reports of toxic traces in imported children's toys, Chen deconstructs representations of racialized bodies and locates subjectivity within disabled and altered bodies. This is not to argue that nuclear disaster and radiation is in any way justified or beneficial, but Chen's framework helps identify instances of adaptation, in which subjects redefine what it means to be a mutated creature and an irradiated person. Roripaugh applies toxicity as a subjectification event, granting agency to people rendered dead or inert following nuclear disaster.

Roripaugh explicitly tackles the invisibility of Japanese survivors of 3/11 in the poem, "anonymous, as invisible man" (50). Writing from the point of view of one of the Fukushima 50, Roripaugh recasts this Japanese factory worker as one of the classic monsters in the Western canon: the invisible man, rendered a victim of science gone wrong.[11] The speaker's opening request, that he agrees "to speak, but only / on condition of anonymity" establishes the context of post 3/11 Japanese media, which downplayed, covered up, and silenced the severity of the disaster in its immediate and ongoing aftermath. From here, the poem is prosaic: the speaker provides in mundane detail a cataloging of what actually occurred that day, describing how the "the terrible jolts / of the Tohoku earthquake / causing the massive tsunami" resulted in flooded generators, overheated fuel

rods, and hydrogen explosions (50). This accounting is poetic in line breaks only, opting instead to provide a mimetic accounting of the situation for some 30 lines. Roripaugh places the poetic burden of this poem on a single simile, arguing that the Fukushima 50 were "prepared to sacrifice / our lives like kamikaze pilots" (51). In this way, she connects the tragedies of 3/11 with that of the Japanese Empire, illustrating that, in both contexts, the everyman is asked to sacrifice for Imperial interests. The poem asks how one's visibility or invisibility is complicated by hydro-colonial militarism and nuclearization, and it answers through imagery of "layering": The speaker's body, now "unrecognizable" is stripped down and "given a too-big track suit… I decline to reveal / my internal radiation levels" (52). The poem names TEPCO as the main culprit behind this coverup, suggesting that the Japanese nation state's attempts to recover economically serve only to bury its people and their radioactive truth.

This imagery of layering returns in "miki endo as flint marko (aka sandman)." This poem sees Roripaugh embodying the voice of the government worker who died providing voice warnings and alerts during the Tohoku typhoon. As in *A Tale for the Time Being*, transpacific drift plays a major role in transporting detritus from Fukushima to the United States with Roripaugh noting how "sneakers filled with foot bones / began to surface in the pacific" (23). This grim imagery again speaks to the importance of seeing irradiated subjects as layered between their bodily forms and the material conditions of their surroundings. Roripaugh visualizes a human body as an object, dissipating within a tide of severed limbs, assaulted by the "terrible siren / swirling around in a loud howl / inside me, but now scattered" (24). Marvel Comics' Sandman is an apt referent: a bit crook whose exposure to radiation subsequently renders his body into the granular aspects of dirt and rock and, at the cellular level, the subatomic quantum nature of atoms. The speaker questions what it means to be a solid form with an interior and an exterior, remembering a swarm of ladybugs covering an unknown object. As a child, the speaker confesses that she was "scared to think about what / could be hiding beneath / this living armor of marched orange" only to eventually realize as an adult that the subject hidden underneath was "nothing… / I mean, nothing was *there* there" (25). In this poem, the result of hydro-colonial irradiation is a literal destabilization of the subject, a person reassembled within the "clicked ticking of the geiger counter" and the "hibernating tsunami siren" (25). This poetics of disintegration echoes what Chen announces as toxicity, an ontology that "straddles boundaries of 'life' and 'nonlife,' as well as the literal bounds of bodies, in ways that introduce a certain complexity to the presumption of integrity of either lifely or deathly subjects" (2011, 279).

Roripaugh reminds us that ecological enmeshment is not to dissolve the human in favor of the nonhuman—what Suzuki calls some material ecocritics' tendency to "overcorrect" (2021, 6)—but to collide, generate friction, react in tandem with one another. This tension does more than pass radiation from coast to coast; in Roripaugh's poetry, this oceanic drift is understood as "heralds for colonies to come" (55). In "tsunami's debris," Roripaugh's self dissolves into

the perspective of the tsunami, a feminized symbol marked by paradox ("her terrible radiance / her radio-waved wake / an awful blossoming") (54). Becoming a tsunami, becoming toxified, is not to cease being human: Rather, it is a reaction to the hydro-colonial, an understanding that rightfully sees the garbage patch as an extension of Midway's nuclear testing (54). The hydro-colonial is depicted as large-scale events and places, ghost ships and cars, landfills of washing machines. In the immensity of the disaster, what the speaker of the poem seeks out is small, microscopic. Roripaugh's invocation of radioactivity suggests both a dissolution and a reassemblage of self through exposure as evidenced at the end of the poem when the speaker asks:

> what tiny bits of debris will you
> unexpectedly ache for?
> what small particles will you
> cling to / as if you actually could? (56)

Ultimately, Roripaugh's attempt to represent in literary form the radioactivity of oceans and humans post 3/11 demonstrates that, although a return to the past is impossible, toxicity provides the possibility of a recuperative future. Unlike the economic recovery touted by the Japanese nation-state, however, this recovery is individualistic. In "mothra flies again," the speaker—a kaiju perhaps—is unable to reconcile the immediate trauma of the event with the speaker's inability to return to a place and time prior to disaster. Deftly weaving together factual evidence of irradiation with popular representations of unchecked nuclear fallout in science fiction and comics, "mothra flies again" encapsulates the feeling of disassociation with reality resulting from the emergency. The speaker questions "how can we ever go back there?" and "*what if? what if? what if?*"(17). This feeling of distance is echoed in other poems such as "tsunami goes to canada," in which the speaker, displaced from her Japanese homeland, wrestles with her new Canadian home by interspersing natural geographic features with Japanese objects, such as when she admits to being "smitten at the mountains" while also feeling the desire to "fall like that / a silvery levering of pachinko balls" (7). Activating the tsunami as speaker here and throughout the collection sees Roripaugh practicing a form of animacy "beyond personification" in Chen's (2011) words; it is Roripaugh's speaker propelling from inanimate memory into a vibrant, perhaps irradiated, life.

Understanding both *A Tale for the Time Being* and *Tsunami vs. the Fukushima 50* as responses to a hydro-colonial disaster is an important step in recognizing the effects of 3/11 upon Japanese and Japanese American persons. This is particularly important in the contexts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which has borne witness to an increased rise in hate crimes and xenophobia toward people of Asian descent. If Asian American literature is often stereotyped as being obsessed with shame, silence, and separation, then reading works with an eye fixed firmly on the influences of capital and global power is a step forward.[12]

The Asian American body has historically and textually been a marker of disaster ("Yellow Peril"), but writers such as Ozeki and Roripaugh underscore a reflexive capacity for toxicity to augment and persevere. Embracing the entanglements of objects, animals, humans, and radioactive material of the Pacific can offer new forms of survivability for Asian American subjects. A focus on hydro-colonial Pacific traffic asks readers to rediscover the particular movements of the ocean, that which swirls, unites, and separates, so that they may imagine a future in which the past and present survive oceanic and nuclear disaster rather than submit and submerge.

Notes

[1]Sharpe's *In the Wake* progresses through multiple permutations of a "wake" from a slaver's path, through a memorial for Black death, and a resuscitation for "keeping and putting breath back in the Black body in hostile weather" (113). Meanwhile, Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic* offers up the ship as a "living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion" that questions "the credibility of a tidy, holistic conception of modernity" (1993, 4, 45).

[2]Matanle, Littler, and Slay (2019) argue that the devastation from the tsunami exemplifies Japan's inability or unwillingness to speedily react to rising seawater levels directly resulting from global warming.

[3]In a special forum for *Comparative Literature*, Hofmeyr, with Kerry Bystrom, names three possible meanings to hydro-colonial: "1) colonization by means of water (various forms of maritime imperialism), 2) colonization *of* water (occupation of land with water resources, the declaration of territorial waters, the militarization and geopoliticization of oceans), and 3) a colony *on* water (the ship as a miniature colony or a penal island)" (2019, 3). Hofmeyr continues to refine and extend this concept in a special issue for *English Language Notes*, which is discussed in more detail in the essay.

[4]Material ecocritisim is best understood as a way of reading matter as expressive and agential, matter being the humans, nonhumans, and "inanimate" objects of texts. This approach, among other things, addresses gaps in sustainability rhetoric and underscores the ongoing and emergent relationships between environments, politics, technology, and the symbolic. See Iovino and Oppermann (2014).

[5]Ozeki is Canadian American, born to a Caucasian father and a Japanese mother.

[6]From here, "Ozeki" is used to discuss the author, and "Ruth" is used to refer to the character.

[7]I agree with Michelle Huang in arguing that Asian American novels and poetry can and should shift focus from "nation-states and peoples" to other critical components of textual analysis (2019, 96). This does not mean that scholars ignore history and questions of identity, but I believe it is essential for scholars to embrace nonhuman relationships in their identity analysis. In Huang's reading of the novel, she employs what she calls "ecologies of entanglement" to analyze "networks of circulation that diffuse the boundaries of the human by foregrounding the relationships between us and the world with which we interact" (2019, 98).

[8]Much of the existing scholarship about Ozeki's novel praises its transnational methodology, which allows her to intertwine feminist themes with global power structures. Marlo Starr writes that Ozeki "puts forward an alternative model of feminism through its depiction of Ruth and Nao's transnational relationship" (2016, 100), arguing that she is Haraway-esque in the way literature links Ruth and Nao across time, distance, and bodies.

Chris D. Jimenez adopts a similar transnational approach that unearths Japan's and the Pacific Northwest's "mutual nuclear histories"—not only the dropping of bombs, but their mining, research, and creation on indigenous lands. (2018, 265). These critical readings discuss the expanses between Ruth and Nao and between Ozeki and the reader, but they do not reconcile the hydro-colonial histories of the Pacific Rim novel with Ozeki's contemplations on ecology and materiality. Neither Japan nor the Pacific Northwest, despite their rendering in the text as remote areas, are geographically or economically isolated. These nations—through war, globalization, and capitalism—have made the Pacific into a network of biopolitical violence, nuclear fallout, and engines of global climate change.

[9]Maxine Polleri's analysis of the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) shows that, in the decade following the 3/11 disaster, the Japanese government adopted a "postpolitical" stance regarding nuclear energy: that it was a necessity. METI also mobilized the anti–fossil fuel rhetoric of environmental activism to reframe discussions of nuclear safety and radioactivity to that of economic recovery (2020, 574–75).

[10]Suzuki argues that the novel "attempts to reimagine an Asian North American identity—exemplified by the fictionalized Ruth Ozeki—that gets aligned not with the abstract circuits of capital but with the materiality of media and the act of mediation" (2021, 192).

[11]H.G. Wells's *The Invisible Man* (1897) is the most prominent example in English literature.

[12]From *The Woman Warrior* to *The Joy Luck Club* to the film *Minari*, notable Asian American texts tend to foreground themes of diaspora, silence, and trauma.

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