

## Wagō Ryōichi's *Net-poetry* and the Revolutionary 'Shared Literature'

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**Abstract** Although the Fukushima literary scenario offers different approaches to the theme of dystopia and trauma, works of literary criticism are still a few. This article aims to turn scholars' attention to the relevance of a critic analysis of Fukushima literary response starting from the production of Wagō Ryōichi and his poetical tweets. The purpose is to suggest new study guidelines concerning the literature of the catastrophe as a genre itself, thorough the investigation of the use of words as a vehicle of memory and by extension, the social role of literature towards catastrophe. Wagō's works also offer the chance to investigate the relationship between literature and social networks, in so far as the success of Wagō's *net-poetry* raises concerns about the development of this global communication system to overcome trauma in real time; as a new mean of literary expression, Wagō's *net-poetry* also contributes to the literary debate by spreading literary works all over the world in just one click.

**Summary** 1 Introduction. – 2 A Voice from Fukushima Debris. – 3 Wagō's *Net-poetry* and the 'Shared Literature'. – 4 Conclusions.

**Keywords** Wagō Ryōichi. Fukushima. Literature. Trauma. Catastrophe.

«Literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested  
in the complex relation between  
knowing and not knowing.  
As it is at the specific point in which  
knowing and not knowing intersect  
that the language of literature and  
psychoanalytic theory of  
traumatic experience precisely meet»  
(Caruth 1996, p. 3)

### 1 Introduction

The three-fold catastrophe of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown that occurred in Japan on 11 March 2011 prompted public attention to reevaluate the nuclear energy debate and its link to the discourse of civilization. Despite all the efforts of international humanitarian aids to help survivors of the devastated Tōhōku area, it was the meltdown of the Fuku-

shima Nuclear Power Plant that captured the attention on a worldwide scale. The dangers arising from nuclear radiation contamination and the struggle over contingency plans in making reactors 1 and 2 safe during their decommissioning – these appeared to be the focus of much media coverage soon after 11 March. Japanese 3/11 became a locus for a double-face disaster, both natural and man-made, including the human mismanagement of the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant.

The first literary responses addressed this double-faced dimension of the disaster: the novelist Murakami Haruki was the first one to talk about *mujō* in his acceptance speech of the International Catalunya Prize in Spain, on 9 June 2011. The Buddhist perspective of *mujō* refers to the transience of the things of the world and the frailty of life. Despite the excessive *ganbarism*, the ability of Japanese to endure hardship (Gebhardt, Masami 2014, p. 13) was sometimes mistaken for indifference or insensibility, the concept of *mujō* serves to better explain the response to 3/11 as the spontaneous reaction of people who have lived with a long history of natural disasters. Although Murakami himself recognized the feeling of resignation implied in *mujō*, the concept revises the stereotype of Japanese as passive, yet hardworking people (DiNitto 2014, p. 343) and takes into consideration the history of Japan as a seismically active area, a place subjected to many earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanic eruptions ever since. The literary tradition itself features many masterpieces by authors like Kamo no Chōmei, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Ibuse Masuji,<sup>1</sup> whose work all expressed a concern about catastrophes and disasters that occurred throughout Japan's history and the efforts necessary to overcome the trauma left in their wake.

Even the Nobel Prize Ōe Kenzaburō stands out as an example of a novelist who admitted the double nature of 3/11 and argued for the necessity for Japan to assume responsibility for the Fukushima disasters: a sense of responsibility that has been somewhat undermined by the victim-consciousness and historical amnesia prompted by the events of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, *genbaku/genpatsu* debate popped out soon

1 Kamo no Chōmei (鴨長明, 1153 or 1155-1216), Japanese essayist and *waka* poet. His masterpiece entitled *Hōjōki* (An Account of a Ten-Foot-Square Hut) is a Japanese literary classic written in 1212, the report of various calamities that stroke the capital Kyōto during what is called the 'Age of Dharma Decline', according to Buddhist thought. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (芥川龍之介, 1 March 1892-24 July 1927), Japanese writer considered the father of the short story. Well-known for being the author of *Rashōmon* (The Wall of Defensive Walls), transposed by director Kurosawa in a filmic masterpiece (1950) that won the Oscar; the Akutagawa Prize now bears his name. This writer witnessed an economic downturn and managed to escape from the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. Ibuse Masuji (井伏鱒二, 15 February 1898-10 July 1993) Japanese novelist famous all over the world for *Kuroi ame* (Black Rain), a work of *genbaku bungaku* considered as a blend of fictional and non-fictional elements.

2 Ōe's feelings are expressed in an article published under the *History Repeats* in the March issue of the *New Yorker* (2011).

after 11 March: scholars underlined the different nature of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings (*genbaku* 原爆) versus the Fukushima nuclear accident (*genpatsu* 原発).<sup>3</sup> Ōe has always been extremely passionate about arguing for no-nuclear proliferation and calling for different modes of historical reflection so to prevent the sinking of Hiroshima and Nagasaki experiences into oblivion in the government's push for a nuclear future;<sup>4</sup> he shares the concerns expressed by many authors like Kawakami Hiromi and Takahashi Gen'ichirō,<sup>5</sup> just to name a few, who actively supported the decision to abolish nuclear-produced electrical power.

*Genshiryoku ni hantai suru hyakko no jyūbunna riyū ~ 100 gute Gründe gegen Atomkraft ~ (100 Good Reasons Against Nuclear Power)*<sup>6</sup> and Project Fukushima are just two of the anti-nuclear movements born soon after 3/11 which involved authors like Tawada Yōko and Wagō Ryōichi respectively. These writers represent the voices of the Japanese people who live in constant fear of nuclear accidents. Their works spread the words of healing and encouragement by keeping alive the memory of both victims and survivors who had to leave the evacuated areas near the Fukushima Nuclear Power Plant and they also bear witness to the traumatic experience of 3/11.

To investigate the role of these literary responses towards what is now simply addressed by scholars as «Fukushima disaster», is then necessary to look deeply into the meaning of «disaster» itself and pay attention to the correlation between it and trauma.

As reported by Rachel DiNitto (2014)<sup>7</sup> a «disaster» can be defined as the work of human agency that occurs when the structure of meaning is

3 See, for example, Kimura Saeko and her *Shinsai bungaku ron. Atarashii Nihon bungaku no tame ni* (A Theory of the Literature of the Catastrophe: For a New Japanese Literature) (2013).

4 See his journalistic inquiry called *Hiroshima Nōto* (Hiroshima notes, 1965), then translated in English and published in 1996.

5 Kawakami Hiromi (川上弘美, 1 April 1958-), Japanese fiction writer. Her participation in Fukushima discourse refers to her rewriting of *Kamisama* (God, 1994) in a nuclear emergency key (*Kamisama 2011*, 2011). The recent collection of essays *Haretari Kumottari* (Sunny, cloudy, 2013) is worth to mention too. Takahashi Gen'ichirō (高橋 源一郎, 1 January 1951-), Japanese fiction and non-fiction writer. Prolific author of essays on Fukushima Disaster theme as 'Ano hi' kara boku ga kangateiru 'tadashisa' ni tsuite (On the 'Correctness' I Have Been Considering Since 'That Day', 2012) and *Hijōji no kotoba: shinsai no ato de* (Language in a Time of Crisis: After the Earthquake 2012). Nevertheless, his first literary response to the 3/11 was the novel *Koi suru genpatsu* (A Nuclear Reactor in Love, 2011).

6 *Genshiryoku ni hantai suru hyakko no jyūbunna riyū ~100 gute Gründe gegen Atomkraft*~, <https://www.100-gute-gruende.de/index.xhtml> (2013-04-09). The bilingual (Japanese-German) author Tawada Yōko (多和田葉子, 23 March 1960-) has been promoting this no-nuclear proliferation project since its birth; *Kumo wo tsukamu hanashi* (A Story That Catches Clouds, 2012) and *Journal des jours tremblants. Après Fukushima* (in French, 2012) are just a few of Tawada's literary production focused on Fukushima disaster.

7 Quotation from Jeffrey Alexander's *Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma* (2004).

destabilized, for it is the collective meaning that provides the «sense of shock and fear, not the events in and of themselves» (DiNitto 2014, p. 342).

According to this theory, 'disaster' is the label given to the consequences that human beings face when natural phenomena or a man-made accident occur. An earthquake or a nuclear accident can be defined as «destructive agent» or «impact agent» (Ligi 2009, p. 16)<sup>8</sup> whose cataclysmic potential is measured by considering the crisis level reached by society after the tragical event. Then the term 'disaster' refers to the social break-up that followed the impact of the extraordinary agent (p. 16). The expression 'social break-up' suggests a chaotic and disordered situation in which people have lost their local points of reference as well as their trust in government as the protector of civilian and human rights. Luisa Bienati (2013, p. 4) also emphasizes that catastrophe is a 'social overturning': the consequence of the destruction of houses and other buildings is the fragmentation of family and community relationship. It is clear here that the collapse of buildings stands for an allegorical image of the disintegration of human relationship in general and in these terms it affects human psychology on a large-scale. In fact, what Ligi calls «carità del natio loco» (charity towards home town) (2009, p. 76) appears to be one of the reason why many people refuse to leave everything behind and escape their lives despite being warned in advance. The epitome «uprooting trauma» (Bienati 2013, p. 6) conveys the fear of losing not only one's beloved and the security of a daily routine but also the loss of one own's past: in other words, the 'natio loco' symbolizes one's own world, created with efforts that must not go to waste.

The 'disaster' thus defined is then associated with 'trauma'. Although the origin of the term can be found in the Greek word for 'wound', psychoanalytic studies attribute the quality of 'traumatic' to a grief of the mind. The difficulty lies in understanding the catastrophe and overcoming the shock and stress associated with it (trauma). The more one attempts to assimilate the nature of the events, the more one feels disoriented: hence trauma can't be identified with the tragic event itself but rather with the after-effects one has to live with daily. Survivors struggle everyday with painful memories that re-emerge out of their control. This crisis, that Freud called «traumatic neurosis» needs to be spoken of, demands our witness (Freud 1913, p. 660).

Generally speaking, 'trauma' and 'disaster' are the words of catastrophe implied on the assumption that a psychological human factor is involved. In this context what DiNitto (2014) called the «narrative of the recovery» is the fundamental key to overcome the trauma: as regards Fukushima disaster, through novels, poems and non-fictional works, the survivors

8 Any translations from Italian and Japanese are to be considered as of the Author, unless otherwise specified.

rediscover that public attention is still focused on nuclear issues and problems concerning the evacuated areas; they also fight against isolation and historical oblivion by keeping the memory of 3/11 alive.

As mentioned previously, the Japanese literary scene provided an immediate response to Fukushima disaster: even authors like Yoshimoto Banana or the literary critic Kuroko Kazuo<sup>9</sup> trod the boards with their fictional and non-fictional contributions to express their own view of the catastrophe and associated trauma. As regards to the worldwide attention paid to Fukushima literary responses, French critics Cécile Sakai and Anne Bayard-Sakai took up with the problem of communicating 3/11; among the essays and articles written in French on this theme, the literary collection published under the title *L'Archipel des séismes* (2012) is worth mentioning. The German scholar Lisette Gebhardt gave a panoramic overview on the fictional and non-fictional responses to Fukushima disaster in her *Literature and Art after Fukushima* (2014), a work co-authored by Masami Yūki; Gebhardt's efforts in investigating authors' opinions towards 3/11 have been appreciated since her first articles published in collaboration with Steffi Richter. Even in Italy, scholars contributed to the scene through the interests shown by Luisa Bienati and Gianluca Coci, just to name a few, and the translation of one of the two Japanese anthologies published on 11 March is titled *Scrivere per Fukushima* in the Italian version (2013); the other one was the first to be translated into English under the evocative title *March was made of Yarn* (2012). Among American native speakers Rachel DiNitto, Margherita Long and Daniel O'Neill have also brought their interests to the debate on Fukushima literary response and its relation with the wider theme of representing catastrophe.

This article aims to contribute to the debate by examining the poetical approach to 11 March via a critical analysis of two poems realised by the poet Wagō Ryōichi, a Fukushima-born Japanese professor who discovered the power of social networks as a vehicle to convey healing and mourning messages in a poetic form. The aim is to demonstrate the literary value of this new production in line with Japanese literary tradition (like the works of literature linked to Hiroshima and Nagasaki, works categorized as *genbaku bungaku* genre in Japanese) and, at the same time, this essay will explore the great innovational power of *net-poetry*, its global circula-

9 Yoshimoto Banana (よしもとばなな, 24 July 1964-), worldwide famous writer thanks to her popculture novels. Her contribute to Fukushima literary debate is recognisable in the fiction *Suiito Hiaafuta* (Sweet Hereafter, 2011); more information about the role her literature has in overcoming the 3/11 trauma can be found in the interview she released to me in 2013 (De Pieri 2014). Kuroko Kazuo (黒古 一夫, 12 December 1945-), well-known literary critic; his works on *genbaku bungaku* are above all notable. In the field of Fukushima literature, the 2013 *Bungakusha no 'Kaku Fukushima ron' Yoshimoto Takaaki, Ōe, Kenzaburō, Murakami Haruki*, (The Literary Scholars' 'Essay on atomic Fukushima'. Yoshimoto Takaaki, Ōe, Kenzaburō, Murakami Haruki, 2013) is of particular importance.

tion in real time and its ability to create a space in which users can comment and share poetic messages.

These two particular features of Wagō's *net-poetry* could maybe represent the missing link between literature (in the form of a poetical production) and trauma: the possibility, if not to overcome the traumatic experience, at least to learn how to deal with it everyday.

## 2 A Voice from Fukushima Debris

Wagō Ryōichi (Fukushima, 1968-) is a Japanese teacher at Fukushima High School; although in the last few years his moral commitment has led him to act as a spokesman for Fukushima disaster, taking time away from teaching classes. His poetical career started in the 1990s, when several collections of his poetry were published, some of which gained a respectable success.

Nonetheless, it is only after 11 March 2011 that Wagō grew in popularity thanks to his poetical response to the disasters: he became the defender of the stricken areas speaking on behalf of those evacuees and victims whose voice was swept away by the tsunami and hushed by the caution measures implemented by the Japanese government to prevent radiation exposure in the areas close to Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant. Love of the homeland that gave him birth and raised him prompts a sort of 'carità del natio loco': by the exhortation «*Fukushima ni ikiru, Fukushima wo ikiru*» (Live in Fukushima, live Fukushima) (Sano, Wagō 2012, p. 94) Wagō encourages survivors to stay in town and collaborate altogether for reconstruction.

Even though this motto was also used as a political slogan<sup>10</sup> by social movements demanding more state intervention in the evacuated areas, the genuineness of Wagō's message results in engagement with different projects aiming at Fukushima's recovery. Among others, Purojekuto FUKUSHIMA (Project FUKUSHIMA) is worth mentioning: an initiative started soon after 11 March with the purpose of helping the people from the surrounding areas of the Fukushima Daiichi Power Station by collecting funds on the official site and promoting events, symposiums, conferences on the theme of 3/11.<sup>11</sup>

This campaign aimed to raise awareness of Fukushima prefecture's real condition after 11 March, and has always been going hand in hand with Wagō's prolific literary production: in less than four years, he published five collections of poems, several artistic works that combine poetry and photography and also a few *taidan* (crossover interviews between authors or literary critics and journalists) a genre very popular in Japan. Famous

10 See Sano and Wagō's crossover 2012, p. 94 and the following.

11 Purojekuto FUKUSHIMA, <http://www.pj-fukushima.jp> (2012-01-22).

are also his public appearances at events and conferences where he usually reads out loud selected poems: these performances, often supported by music accompaniment, achieved resounding success among the audience and are sometimes adapted into books or sold as CDs.<sup>12</sup> The poet is involved in television and radio appearances, too: he manages his own radio program called *Shi no tsubute ~ Wagō Ryōichi's akushon poejii* (Pebbles of poetry – The action poetry by Ryōichi Wagō). This goes on air every Sundays at 17:45 from Radio Fukushima;<sup>13</sup> each show introduces a different topic of discussion concerning 3/11 organized around Wagō's poems, read and commented by the author himself. Wagō's poetry offers a panoramic perspective on the emotional chaos experienced by victims who survived the 11 March catastrophe: anxiety, fear, mourning, are just a few of the disarming feelings Wagō matches with the more positive messages of hope, recover as well as the possibility of overcoming the trauma.

The educational background of the author must be kept into mind too: he was in the middle of a school meeting when the magnitude 9.0 earthquake struck off the Tōhoku coasts; his familiarity with Japanese literary tradition draws him to return to the classics as a site to generate new interpretative works based on the 3/11 tragedy. Here is an example:

をせをせをせ  
 をせをせ  
 いきれをせをせ  
 をせのをせ

Give back my soul, give back my dreams, give back Fukushima, give back my life, give back my hometown, give back the grass, give back my village, give back my poetry, give back the walnut tree (May 25, 2011, 22:19)<sup>14</sup>

This free-verse poem is now available for readers in both Japanese and English versions, as a part of a longer poetical work published on Wagō's official website under the title *Suiheisen'yo Chiheisen'yo* (Horizon Over the Sea, Horizon Over the Land).<sup>15</sup> Although originally it was conceived as

12 The first one to stress the importance of a «performative, dialogical uses of language» was Dominick LaCapra (2001, Preface).

13 *Shi no tsubute – Ryōichi Wagō no akushon poejii*, [http://www.rfc.jp/podcast/podcast\\_program.php?program\\_id=4](http://www.rfc.jp/podcast/podcast_program.php?program_id=4) (2016-03-02). The author takes part in JFN radio program too, [http://www.jfn.jp/RadioShows/place\\_thu/624](http://www.jfn.jp/RadioShows/place_thu/624) (2015-01-02).

14 This poem was composed by only one tweet (verse). The graphic layout is a mere editorial expedient.

15 <http://wago2828.com/translation/3584.html> (2016-05-30).



a tweet in itself, published on 25 May 2011 on Wagō's Twitter profile, this poem's length follows perfectly the social network rules of writing with no more than 140 characters (the relation between Wagō's poetry and social networks will be discussed in details later).

Nevertheless, the poem also reveals an incredible intensity of expression for the topic covered: soul, dreams and life are all synonyms for the future. On 11 March soul was grief-stricken, dreams were blown to pieces and several people lost their lives in the same way they lost their hope for future, choked with fear of radiation, anxiety for the reconstruction, helplessness in front of an unknown tomorrow. The «Fukushima» quotation represents the double face of the same coin, both nostalgic and destructive. Here «Fukushima» refers not only to the prefecture but also to a space inclusive of people, animals, material assets taken away from the tsunami, first, and by governmental measure of evacuation, second; it personifies 3/11 in its destructive power to the extent that it has become impossible to pronounce the name of «Fukushima» nowadays without immediately connecting it to the 11 March catastrophe. At the same time, the imperative «give back Fukushima» aims at drawing readers' memories of an untouched Fukushima before the earthquake; the same nostalgic feeling arises again in the words «give back my hometown», where the author refers to Fukushima as well as to Japan in the broadest sense, calling for the collective participation of all Japanese people to respond to the tragedy of the Tōhōku areas. Generally speaking, it is not wrong to say that these two verses springs from the poet's intimate sphere, as remarked by the few verses about poetry and walnut tree, both which are dear to the poet, and expanded in social influence to the public sphere, where Japanese people are involved as a group.

This choice reflects Tōge Sankichi's work in *Ningen wo kaese* (Give back human race) a poem engraved on a monument in front of the Hiroshima Peace Memorial; this poem is well-known all over the world as the symbol for peace after Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings. Composed at the beginning of the 1950s, the poem states as follows:

にんげんをかえせ  
ちちをかえせははをかえせ  
としよりをかえせ  
こどもをかえせ

わたしをかえせわたしにつながる  
にんげんをかえせ  
にんげんのにんげんのよのあるかぎり  
くずれぬへいわを  
へいわをかえせ



Give back human race  
 Give back my father, give back my mother  
 Give old people back  
 Give children back

Give back myself the human race I am connected to,  
 Give them back  
 As long as this life lasts, this life,  
 Give back peace  
 That will never end  
 (Tōge 1951)

The original version of this poem was entitled *Iki* (Life) and sounds slightly different from the one published only later in the collection called *Genbaku Shishū* (Poems of the Atomic bomb, 1951); even though this study is not focused on the genre *genbaku bungaku*, the new perspective this poem gives to Wagō's tweet is remarkable. The incisive imperative «give», repeated several times in both poems hides a feeling of anger while resentment and indignation symbolize the common denominator nourished by nuclear power-linked tragedies experienced by the two authors. Wagō confirmed in a personal interview he released to me in 2013 that this analogy is not a mere chance: «This is a poem I wrote while being inspired by Tōge Sankichi» (De Pieri 2014, pp. 203-206).

Wagō also shared the same struggle over language, specifically the inability to depict the disaster through words: this difficulty of expression was also reported and thematized by many *genbaku* authors such as Ōta Yōko, Hara Tamiki and Tōge Sankichi himself.<sup>16</sup> This representational challenge led to the creation of neologisms as well as *hiragana* and *katakana* experimentations, adopted also by Wagō who declared: «for the sake of a new poetry, let's live a new poetry» (Wagō 2012), adding his voice to Tōge in calling for the release of a new poetical production.

Despite the frequent homages Wagō pays to the Japanese literary tradition, it is in his choice of using social networks as a vehicle for poetry that he obtained success. Although the link between literature and social media will be analysed later, the innovative aspects of this *net-poetry* are brought to attention through a poem written on 21 March, 2013 on Wagō's Twitter profile and here it will be reproduced entirely despite its unusual length:

**16** Ōta Yōko (大田洋子, 18 November 1906-10 December 1963), Hara Tamiki (原民喜, 15 November 1905-13 March 1951) and Tōge Sankichi (峠三吉 19 February 1917-10 March 1953) are *genbaku bungaku* writers who witnessed the atomic bombings. They struggled to convey their experiences into words (*hiragana* and *katakana* experimentation's origins can be found here); Ōta in particular expressed several times the inadequacy of Japanese language in front of the catastrophe.

をくためになこと 孤独

To write poetry you need isolation

をくためになこと にないこと

To write poetry you need something words cannot express

をくためになこと な

To write poetry you need a useless day

をくためになこと 殺気

To write poetry you need a thirst for blood

をくためになこと のの

To write poetry you need no man's park at night

をくためになこと いい

To write poetry you need to think about something and laugh

をくためになこと り

To write poetry you need betrayal

をくためになこと つながれたのしさ

To write poetry you need the beloved hand you managed to tie

をくためになこと いま ここ あなたをうためいき

To write poetry you need now, here, thinking about you, a sigh

をくためになこと スタイル・カウンシル

To write poetry you need Police, David Bowie, Style Council,  
Sakamoto Ryūichi

をくためになこと 小指

To write poetry you need the little finger

をくためになこと るに こぼれる 涙

To write poetry you need tears ran down before sleeping

をくためになこと 柿

To write poetry you need a kaki tree

をくためになこと りげるまえののしなり

To write poetry you need the feeling when a fish swallows the bait  
before catching it

をくためになこと のの

To write poetry you need wine before a toast

をくためになこと 恋人

To write poetry you need your lover

をくためになこと 屈辱

To write poetry you need humiliation

をくためになこと あらゆるへのとにうためになものとはかをうこと

To write poetry you need to ask what is necessary in order to fight completely the discriminations against all weak people

をくためになこと さ

To write poetry you need weakness

をくためになこと さをる さ

To write poetry you need strength to protect weakness

をくためになこと 山

To write poetry you need mounts

をくためになこと そこにがあるからるための

To write poetry you need trekking shoes to climb the mountain over there

をくためになこと の奥の そののけ...

To write poetry you need in the forest deeply inside loophole...

をくためになこと 六本木七丁目交差点

To write poetry you need Roppongi nanachōme intersection

をくためになこと もいないの

To write poetry you need the desolated Namie Station

をくためになこと であるいはスター

で で で この

を ここまでんだ あなたの

To write poetry you need your profile while reading these tweets 'till this one at the MacDonald's or Starbucks with your smartphone or your laptop

をくためになこと 革命

To write poetry you need revolution

をくためになこと 後悔

To write poetry you need regret

をくためになこと るにの で なんとなくをつめているあなた それをつめている  
もうの のあなた

To write poetry you need you, somehow staring at the monitor in  
front of your laptop before sleeping and you, in your heart, staring at  
everything

をくためになこと かな

To write poetry you need the quiet Pacific Ocean

をくためになこと 防護服

To write poetry you need protecting clothing

をくためになこと 桜

To write poetry you need cherry trees

をくためになこと の

To write poetry you need a spring hawk

をくためになこと 詩

To write poetry you need poetry

あなたにとって

をくためになこととはですか

どうか

きをおいします おやすみなさい...

For you «To write poetry you need» what?

please, continue [doing poetry] somehow goodnight

(March 23, 2013, 23:50 ca)

Each poetical verse of this poem represents a tweet posted on the social network, for a total of 38 tweets; Wagō refreshed the *renzoku geemu*, a very popular game in Japan which consists of a series of words closely related to each other: a kind of brain storming exercise allows players to reveal their feelings, ideas, and thoughts. As the game of word association can be very intimate and private, it is not surprising that sometimes the reader runs up against the difficulty of understanding the connections between verses.

Here «isolation» and «no man's park at night» are expressions used to describe the loneliness that filled up Fukushima city after 3/11. The anger against an unfair destiny is underlined by the keywords «a thirst for blood» (the need to find a culprit), «betrayal» (government's lies about the

security of Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant, which was about to be decommissioning in March 2011 becoming obsolete), «regret» (regards the lack of efforts to avoid the tragedy). The words «humiliation» and «weakness» stand for a sense of powerlessness victims shared after the tsunami. The different places to which the poet was acclimatized (Roppongi, as well as the Namie Station) are frequently mentioned. The awareness of the media and literary «revolution» in which the poet has a leading role is demonstrated by the poetic reflections on laptop and smartphone users and the multinational corporations of junk food. A direct reference to the nuclear danger can be found in the expression «protective clothing» while the need of trekking shoes suggests a wild path to cover in order to climb a mountain: the desire to reach the top and recover the sense of self-control lost during the earthquake; at the same time, the protection found in the depths of the forest suggests the wish to get to the deepest recess of one's heart, where trauma lingers.

What is surprising is the final invitation to continue by participating in the process of creating the poem: although many verses are devoted to loved ones, here Wagō takes advantage from the social network's potentiality to get directly in touch with the users and asking directly to participate in composing poetry. Users' feelings, ideas, thoughts, are now taken into account: readers are no longer passive, but they are asked to be active, to challenge themselves in promoting literature, as well as to volunteer in social activities in the evacuated areas. These interfaces can be read between the lines. To this final request of writing, which all of us are required to answer: the original Japanese version of the verse «to write a poetry you need» is actually an impersonal one, a stylistic choice that underlines the universal message sent by Wagō.

### 3 Wagō's Net-poetry and the 'Shared Literature'

The 'twitterature' phenomenon is still a long way from being a new revolution. The term, clearly a portmanteau word of 'Twitter' and 'literature', was probably coined by web users and became well-known thanks to Alexander Aciman and Emmett Rensin's book *Twitterature* (2009). Here is how the authors described their idea of 'twitterature' (Aciman, Rensin 2010): «if the Prince of Denmark [Hamlet] had a Twitter account and an iPhone, he could tell his story in real time - and concisely! Hence the genius of *Twitterature*».

It was in 2008 that for the first time the relation between literature and Twitter came to the fore; created in 2006, this social network is used by almost 284 million monthly active users, with an average of 500 million tweets sent per day (according to Twitter Inc). Hence it is not surprising that 'twitterature' draws the attention of literary critics too.

The «literary social networking» as Dylan Hicks called it (2010) is the attempt to get online literature underway through the rediscovery of ancient classics or modern experimentation with lyricism. The only one rule to follow is not to exceed 140-character, a maximum imposed by the medium. This formal constraint can operate in different modes literary productions: from aphorisms and *haiku* to other forms of serialized fictional productions under the neologisms of 'tweet fic' (Twitter fiction) or 'twiller' (Twitter thriller), just to name a few, that extend over multiple tweets. Every Twitter user can contribute with a micro-narrative on Twitter, according to one's own taste or creativity or it can correspond to someone else's preference: just add the hashtag #140novel or similar, as suggested by the British newspaper *The Guardian* in autumn 2012. This newspaper was also the first one to raise doubts about the birth of a new literary genre, through the voice of the journalist Claire Armitstead (2014). Although this new way of microblogging challenges people to write deeper than what Twitter requires, numerous guides and pamphlets for beginners have been made available on the Internet since 2008. Even today 'twitterature' has brought notoriety to a few users.

The Japanese fostered a totally different approach to social networks. As noted by the journalist Inose Naoki (2011, p. 7), the mass media had a fundamental role in the transmission of information with special issues devoted to the tsunami and earthquake updates, via radio and television, but there were also the new social networks (Facebook and Twitter in primis) that guaranteed a constant flow of information concerning the real condition of the disaster areas, the emergency number to refer to, the different ways to collaborate with voluntary activities and above all, messages warning others about the aftershocks that followed the earthquake. Hence, the innovational production of Wagō Ryōichi can be considered as a missing piece of a puzzle that shows a joined portrait of catastrophe-trauma-literature triplets.

Actually, 11 March 2001 marked a turning point for Wagō Ryōichi's poetical career: on 16 March he started publishing his poems on Twitter and got immediate feedback from users from the web. In a *taidan* with the non-fiction writer Sano Shin'ichi the poet declared this was not a conscious choice (Sano, Wagō 2012, p. 36): «I merely didn't think about it, felt like my fingers moved naturally. As writing poems like that have always been an habit, fingers moved on their own way». Wagō loses his thoughts into words unconsciously; the critic Takushi Odagiri observed:

Despite its apparently straightforwardness, Wagō's work is neither a simple representation, nor message, nor even a call for action [...] nor simply an inert report of post-earthquake experiences. [...] Wagō's tweets accidentally become *acts* generated by historical circumstances. (Odagiri 2014, p. 368)

Wagō's tweets are not a mere sequence of updates by an anonymous user of the network: they make history in the form of poems; it is not wrong to consider Wagō's *net-poetry* as a non-fictional production realised in a poetical form rather than the common narrative one.

A consciousness of linguistic nuances and grammatical structures is needed in order to be able to publish in only 140 characters; nevertheless, despite the winnowing down of words before composing poetry, the poet has never felt constrained nor the need to revise his feelings: the result is a straightforward production in which all 11 March victims can identify themselves (Azuma 2012, p. 16): «At that time, I intuitively noticed that what I wrote before the disaster was given forth by unconscious stances, in 'updating language' or literary language.»

What is thought-provoking here is the use of an «updating language» (the language of social networks updates) and a literary language (the one typical of poetical lyricism) at the same time.

Although all poems are subsequently published in a proper way on print media, they all first witnessed their birth on the social network: the term 'net-poetry' tries to explain this ambivalent nature. On one hand, the abbreviation 'net' stands for 'network', a global platform that connects users worldwide; on the other side, 'poetry' refers to the artistic choice of composing poems and the lyricism peculiar to this literary genre. Even if poetry is thought to be useless because it cannot provide tangible help, Wagō continues posting his poetry on Twitter and Facebook channel non-stop, because he does not have any other means of expression. The great sense of helplessness due to the fact that «you can't describe in a proper way the earthquake disaster status Fukushima is embracing» (Sano, Wagō 2012, p. 48) is a motivating factor that the authors who tried their hand at describing catastrophe share. If communicating is impossible, what is necessary then are the efforts in doing it: «I would like to tell the reality of the stricken Fukushima to several people» (Sano, Wagō 2012, p. 63). The need to describe the traumatic experience and the authors' sense of responsibility will find an answer in the desire of keeping victims' memories alive so that their sacrifice would not be considered vain and, at the same time, to stress the importance of a social commitment to promote nuclear disarmament:

As long as there will be at least one person who reads or tells [about disaster] I think that work of literature will be necessary. Moreover, I think it should become a sort of bridge of words to connect the readers with next future, expressed in a new way. The fear of earthquake and tsunami, the fear of society's lies, and then, after Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, the current nuclear fallout... I think that if we do not speak about these events properly then they will happen again. Above all, after accepting the fact that several people lost their lives in



the disaster: after this recognition of loss, I think one must carry on to tell everybody these stories. (Wagō 2013, private interview)

It was the poet who expressed clearly his feelings in the interview he released to me in 2013. Like Ōe and most of the Japanese people, Wagō too, connected the danger of nuclear contamination with the experiences of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, underlining the role of literature and the sense of trauma and responsibility that all human beings have to bear in the face of catastrophe. Wagō's attempt is to spread this message worldwide, putting in the foreground the victims' memories. Social networks are the best means to pursue this aim: on the one hand, they register specific dates and time, functioning as real documentary testimonies; on the other hand, social media sites may connect users from all over the world and Wagō's poetry becomes a literary work immediately enjoyable by the global public. As seen earlier, the possibility of taking an active part in composing poetry merits full investigation, too, as the creative contribution from web users helped FUKUSHIMA<sup>17</sup> literary works to proliferate and spread (Sano, Wagō 2012, p. 39): «I felt like they were encouraging me 'let's try continuing tomorrow too'». Users' comments, opinions, ideas, are welcomed by the author who is inevitably boggled by them. The result is a literary production influenced directly by public interests, marking out a change in themes, subjects, and environment. A 'global' way to compose poetry, totally anew, has seen its birth: the 'shared literature', characterized by the possibility of 'sharing' poetry as well as one's own view of poetry, in the form of comments or new verse, in real time all over the world. Wagō (2013, private interview) stated:

I think that social networks offers us what would be a revolutionary way of communication. I think that poetry should be sensitive to the demands of communication, above all. So I really feel poetical means should change. I think everyday about the meeting point between social networks and poetry.

## 4 Conclusion

Throughout human history, the world has been fraught with many catastrophic and tragic events that transform literature into a serious work of art that bears witness to the trauma. The Jewish Shoah, Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings, Armenia and Rwanda genocides, 11 Septem-

<sup>17</sup> Here the capital letters for FUKUSHIMA stand for a city suffering from atomic contamination, as the bombarded HIROSHIMA and NAGASAKI, written in *katakana* in the major *genbaku bungaku* works.

ber, the 2004 Sumatra Earthquake: these are only a few of the disaster events witnessed by modern age.

Many survivors think about oblivion as the only way to stop sorrow and pain even though «one cannot simply leave [it] behind» (Caruth 1996, p. 2): the price to be paid when one tries to hide a traumatic experience is not being able to overcome the trauma it caused.

Other survivors felt the urge to speak on behalf of those who refused to do so, or have no longer a voice to tell of their experience. The witness, although fuelled by a range of different reasons, is above all driven by the need to keep both personal and social memory alive. Hence the importance of a literary study as a written testimony: first or second hand accounts normally take the shape of documentary novels, journalistic enquiries and other piece of literature which refer to non-fictional genre. A thorny topic is to define the approach of novels (and narratology in a wider sense) in offering an alternative mode of understanding trauma provoked by the catastrophe. If both the second hand accounts and the fictional re-productions of the traumatic event raise doubts about the authenticity of the experience described, then the documentary approach to tragedy will also call into question the literariness of the piece of work itself.

Independently of the oral or written forms the testimony assumes, it is always the work of deformation and the reworking of a personal experience that cast doubt about the reliability of the account. The intrinsic value of this work of translating catastrophe and trauma into narrative form, is predicated on (Caruth 1996, p. 4) «the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.» In other words, any endeavour to convey into words a traumatic experience become an opportunity for sharing the knowledge of it (Caruth 1996, p. 5): «[it] must, indeed, also be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding».

This study does not uphold the literary value of Wagō's 'net-poetry': it outlines the innovation of this new expressive language as a meeting point between literature and social networks: unlike other literary productions (see 'twitterature') the 'net-poetry' can be considered as a psychoanalytic means to overcome collective trauma, a process of overcoming that is aided by two qualities attributed to the social media itself: the possibility of communicating in real time and the quality of being a part of the worldwide system of communication. In other terms, a victim can share his feeling of fear, loss and astonishment with thousands other users worldwide at the same time, thanks to socials; moreover, and this is peculiar to Wagō's 'net-poetry', those feelings are reproduced in a poetical form, and its lyricism arouses empathy, sensibility, pathos, with the result of fighting together the loneliness and powerlessness of the traumatic situation.

Here hence the difference between *genbaku bungaku* genre: though the common denominator of nuclear radiation exposure by the victims, now la-

belled as 'hibakusha', the exceptionality of Hiroshima and Nagasaki atomic bombings still generates a ghettoize literary works on nuclear radiation, a lack of knowing as a contributing factor. As a result, this genre has been rediscovered only in the recent years compared to the Fukushima literary responses; otherwise, Fukushima literature remarked from the beginning is concerned with the universal repercussion of the accident occurred at Daiichi Power Plant.

The voices of Wagō and other authors helped to raise awareness among the public on the nuclear issue and to keep alive the memory of the victims through messages of commemoration and healing. Actually, among the topics for thought in Wagō's poems, according to the frequent discussions about the meaning of words, poetry, and the poet himself, there is also a Japanese motto often repeated: 'akenai yoru wa nai' (There's no night that does not open to the day); a motto embraced by all earthquake victims who, in Wagō's poetry, found brightness after the darkness of the 11 March 2011.

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